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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ON DELICATE GROUND.]

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

CHAPTER XIII.

True to his promise, Lionel went over to the Hall on the morning following his conversation with Otho, and did not leave till evening, the interval being spent in roaming about the grounds and sundry games of tennis, in which Adrienne joined.

She could not play well yet, having only just commenced to learn, but she promised to be in time an excellent player—her sight was so keen, her movements were so quick and agile, that she seemed to have every requisite for mastering the game.

She was very bright and lively; and Sir Ralph, who stood by, watching while they played, declared it did him good to hear her merry laugh—he liked to see her enjoying herself, and to feel that he had been instrumental in bringing her happiness.

After luncheon he was called away to trans-

act some business with his steward; and the three younger ones strolled out on the terrace, and from thence down the marble steps to the lawn, where Adrienne paused to gather a knot of rosebuds to place in her dress.

"You are fond of flowers, Lady Lynwood?" Lionel said, observing the action.

"Yes," she responded, simply. "I always think of Heaven as a place where flowers never fade."

Otho's lip curled a little contemptuously at the answer, but to Lionel the fancy seemed graceful enough.

"I had forgotten that I have a letter to write, which I want sent to the village in time for the afternoon post," observed the former, as if struck by a sudden thought. "Will you excuse me for a few minutes, Adrienne?"

"Certainly."

"I suppose I shall find you out here when I have finished my correspondence?"

"Oh, yes; the day is much too lovely to be spent indoors—at least, I think so," she added, with a glance at Lionel; "but I don't wish to compel Mr. Egerton to remain out if he prefers being in the house."

"Which is assuredly not the case," put in the young man, smiling. "I am as fond of the fresh air as you are, and nothing will give me greater pleasure than the privilege of being allowed to stay with you, while Captain Lynwood writes his letter."

"You had better show Egerton the cascade in the shrubbery, Adrienne," said Otho, as he turned away. "It has been made since his departure from England, and he'll think it a great improvement."

Adrienne obeyed the suggestion, and led the way through a tangled labyrinth of shrubs to a more open space, where a miniature waterfall dashed itself into spray against the great stones that were piled up to intercept its progress.

It was very pretty just here, in the green hush of the noon tide. Overhead the branches of the trees interlaced so thickly that the sunlight only pierced through in places, and fell tremulously on the moss below, while the heat and glare of the summer day were subdued to a cool greenness that was very refreshing.

Multitudes of ferns of every variety grew about, their fronds waving like long, graceful



feathers, and foxgloves; and other wild flowers were equally plentiful.

"Is it not pretty?" Adrienne said, as she seated herself on a rustic bench, and invited him to a place at her side. "If one had retained one's old belief in fairies and wood elves one would imagine this to be just the sort of place they would love to haunt."

"Yes," he answered, jestingly; "and who shall say they have vanished? For ought we know they may still dance about in their magic circles at midnight, and hide away in the bells of foxgloves, or under the toadstools, in the daytime. This is a prosaic age, certainly; but I don't see why, when we are in the country, and away from this terrible civilisation which is such an enemy to poetry, we should not indulge in the old myths once more."

"They were certainly very charming," said Adrienne, musingly. "Imagine sitting here and then looking up to encounter the laughing eyes of a faun from amongst the leaves, or Undine rising slowly from the water, crowned with lilies! It almost makes one wish oneself back in the old days, when such beliefs were possible."

"The poetry of which their form was the embodiment is still with us, only it has taken a different shape."

She shook her head disconsolately. "I don't think so. I used to once, but now it seems to me poetry is dead."

He looked at her keenly—what did the confession mean on her lips?

"They say poetry and happiness never go together," he observed, and she caught eagerly at the suggestion.

"I should imagine it is true. I used to feel much more poetic in my little garden at Brussels than I do here, but for all that I am much happier now."

"I am glad—very glad you are happy."

"How could I be otherwise?" she said, simply turning her lustrous eyes full upon him. "Everyone is so good to me, so kind—especially Sir Ralph and Otho."

"You like Captain Lynwood?"

A shadow of unrest came over her face.

"Yes—at least, I think I like him very much, but he impresses me strangely sometimes. I cannot explain how exactly, but I feel as if a cold wind were blowing over me, and chilling my heart. It sounds stupid, does it not? And more than that, it is ungrateful to speak of it, for he is kind himself towards me."

Lionel did not speak for some time—as a matter of fact, he was lost in thought. He had fancied he knew Otho Lynwood's character pretty accurately, and he had imagined the officer's rage at his uncle's marriage would be unbounded—indeed, he never for a moment supposed that he would design to set foot in Lynwood Hall again. But here he was, accepting his disinheritance with the most perfect grace, and instead of exhibiting animosity towards the woman who had supplanted him, treating her with uniform consideration—even affection.

It was strange, certainly, but Lionel supposed he must have misjudged his old school-fellow, or that the character of the latter had undergone some change.

Presently a slight sound made him look up, and he saw the object of his thoughts coming towards them, accompanied by Sir Ralph.

They stopped when they were a few paces off, and the soldier said, laughingly,—

"Don't they look idyllic, those two? They might be sitting for a picture of Strophan and Amaryllis."

Sir Ralph did not look particularly pleased at the comparison, but his brow cleared a little as he seated himself beside his wife.

"Have you been here long?" he inquired.

"Not very long—about half an hour, I should think."

"But that is long," he said, the frown returning.

"Is it?" Adrienne said, innocently. "It

did not seem so—the time has passed very quickly."

The baronet rose rather hastily, and offered his arm, which she took, and they walked back towards the house, followed by the two young men.

"Have you had much boating this summer?" asked Lionel, breaking the pause that ensued.

"Not a great deal—I am not much of a waterman, you know. Adrienne was saying the other day how much she should like to learn to scull, and I was too modest to offer to teach her, as I was conscious of how very unscientific was my own method. You are a 'swell' on the water, aren't you?"

"I used to pull decently—you see, I had some excellent facilities for practising at King's Dene, as the river was so near at hand."

"Well, we have the same facilities here. You had better take Lady Lynwood out, and give her one or two lessons," said Otho, carelessly, and, of course, Egerton immediately professed his willingness to do so.

Accordingly the next day when he came to the Hall he found Adrienne dressed in a loose white flannel costume, and Otho busy with his fishing tackle.

"I'm sorry I can't come with you," said Sir Ralph, ruefully. "Unfortunately there is a magistrates' meeting at W—, and I am bound to attend. Take care you don't get upset or come to grief in any way."

"You needn't be afraid, Sir Ralph," responded Lionel; "I'll be answerable for Lady Lynwood's safety."

"Richards has packed a hamper with provisions, so you'll be able to picnic on the island, and if the day fulfils its present promise it will be a lovely one."

The day did fulfil its promise, and a more exquisite one it would have been impossible to wish for. The River Dene wound through the Lynwood estate, after having passed King's Dene on its way, so they had not far to go to embark.

Sir Ralph had built a pretty little boat-house on the bank, and here a light and elegant-looking little skiff was launched, in which the trio seated themselves, Lionel taking the sculls, and Otho steering, while Adrienne also sat in the stern, watching Egerton as he explained to her the science of managing a boat.

Presently they changed places, and she took the sculls in her pretty pink fingers, rolling her sleeves up, and thus displaying her rounded arms and dimpled elbows. She got on very well with her lesson; but it tired her, and she was soon glad to resume her old seat.

"Isn't this delightful?" she said, enthusiastically, as she leaned back, and looked round her with a deep sigh of pleasure. "I wish your sister had been with us, Mr. Egerton."

"Yes, I tried my best to persuade her to come, for I knew she would enjoy it; but she declined on account of a bad headache. I fancy she has not recovered from that fainting fit she had the other night at your house."

"It was such a severe one," returned Adrienne, sympathetically. "I wonder what caused it."

"The heat of the room, I expect; at least, that is what she herself attributes it to. She says she went out on the terrace for the purpose of getting a little fresh air; but it was too late, the mischief was already done."

"When is she going to be married?" asked Otho.

Lionel's brow clouded. "I don't know—nothing is settled yet."

"Do you know her fiancé?"

"No, never saw him; but I expect I shall next week, for he is coming down to King's Dene. I think it is his wish the wedding should take place without delay."

"Naturally," observed Otho, and the subject dropped.

They had luncheon on an island about three miles higher up the river than King's Dene,

and when it was over Otho announced his intention of fishing.

"What shall you two do?" he inquired.

"I think I shall take Lady Lynwood to see the ruins of the old monastery; it is not very far—not more than a mile, I should think."

"Do so, by all means, and when you come back I hope I shall be able to show you, as the result of my industry, enough fish for breakfast to-morrow morning."

Adrienne thought that it was even pleasanter without Otho than with him. She did not put the thought into words, but it suggested itself involuntarily. Lionel seemed less reserved when they were alone, and they could talk more freely of the many tastes they shared in common, of books, and music, and art, besides which he had many stories to tell her of the adventures that had befallen him in the far East, and she was never tired of listening.

He possessed the gift of word-painting in a singular degree, and spoke with a certain graphic eloquence that ran no risk of wearying his listener. He was no agitator, and restrained as much as possible from mentioning his own exploits; but he could not always prevent this, and it became clear that his life for the last few years had been full of colour, of variety, and excitement.

"How nice it would be to be a man for a year or two," sighed Adrienne, half enviously, "and to go to the East, and see all its wonderful palaces, and those beautiful, luxuriant tropical forests."

"Yes," responded Lionel, smiling. "I think, in this world, men have by far the best of it; perhaps it will be made up for to your sex in the next."

"I don't know that that is so," said the young girl inconsequently; "if men have a few advantages, they have often to go out into the world, and be continually knocked about, while women are taken care of at home."

He laughed at this very naive definition of the relative positions of the sexes.

"And you like the idea of being taken care of?"

"Oh, yes. I am not strong-minded, you know, and I like to have someone stronger than myself to look up to. But do not let us talk any more," she added, leaning back on her cushion. "It is so beautiful here, that I want to do nothing but just enjoy it."

The sun was high in the azure dome above, and poured its beams with beatiful lavishness on the glistening earth. They were passing through fields golden with buttercups, or a scarlet blaze of poppies, or silvered over with the white-and-yellow brodery of moon daisies, and every now and again they came upon a group of cattle, knee-deep in water, and looking with large, mild-eyed astonishment at the young man and young woman whose boat glided so swiftly past the forget-me-not fringed banks.

The water lilies were over, but their great, broad, cool leaves lay like green plates on the surface of the water, through which Adrienne was trailing her slim white fingers, and then holding them up, and letting the glittering drops slip through, with a childish enjoyment that made Lionel smile.

The excursion was to him very pleasant, and the day a red letter one in his calendar. Why could not life be ever thus—why could he not always float onwards in the sunshine, with the beauties of the summer landscape about him, and a fair woman smiling opposite, whose eyes were bluer than either the skies above them, or the forget-me-not flowers on the bank?

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. GILBERT FAUNCE had a very fine town-house, sumptuously furnished, and looking out on the park; but beyond this, he had offices in the city, where loans of fabulous amounts were negotiated, and where only a favoured few were admitted to his presence.

On the afternoon in question, he was sitting there alone, leaning back in a very comfortable

chair, and gazing through the smoky windows at the chimneys and roofs that constituted the view. But it was not of the view he was meditating—his thoughts were away from hot, dusty London, at King's Dene, and it was with the beautiful daughter of the house that they were chiefly occupied.

He was as much in love with Nathalie, as it was possible for him to be in love with anyone; which is to say, that her beauty had taken a vivid hold on his senses, and he felt that he would give half his fortune to make her his wife. Well, she would be his wife, and soon too, for he had resolved the marriage should take place without more delay than was possible, and that the date should be fixed the next time he saw her.

Suddenly, his meditations were interrupted by a knock at the door, and the entrance of a clerk.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," he said, respectfully.

"A lady!" repeated Farquhar in surprise, and instantly his thoughts flew to Nathalie. "Show her up immediately," he added, and stood waiting in breathless suspense until she appeared, when he sank down on his chair again, muttering an oath below his breath.

This was not Nathalie—it was a woman of shorter stature, and less graceful presence, dressed in a long ulster, and wearing a thick veil over her face, which she flung aside directly the clerk left the room. The countenance thus revealed was, or rather had been, handsome, for now it was worn and haggard, and the only beauty remaining lay in the large dark eyes, and the abundant black hair.

"You!" muttered Farquhar, by way of greeting, and to judge from his tone of voice, the visitor was not exactly a welcome one.

"Yes, Gilbert, it is I—Joyce. Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked, very wistfully, and she came and knelt at his side, looking up into his eyes, while her own softened by intense emotion. "Are you not glad to see me?"

This introduction seemed to surprise him considerably—he had evidently expected one of a very different nature, and the words that had been on his lips died away unuttered, as he saw it would be expedient to change the tone he had intended adopting towards her.

He raised her from her humble attitude, kissed her, and placed her on a chair near his own.

"Of course I am glad to see you, so long as you are reasonable; but I told you you were not to come to my office—I strongly object to having private and business affairs mingled."

"But I had no other chance of seeing you, for if I had gone to your chambers, I should have been refused admittance as I was once before, and I dared not risk it. Ah! Gilbert," she clasped her wasted hands together and looked into his face, with eyes that were as eloquent as words; "I can't tell you how I longed to see you—how I forgot all the past, and the cruel wrong you had done me, just for the desire to look in your face and hear your voice once again!"

Farquhar did not respond to this outburst, and pitiful as it was in its expression of a love that had survived shame and neglect, its only effect was to embarrass him.

"Yes, yes, Joyce; it is very good of you, I know, but did I not tell you there must be an end of that sort of thing six months ago?" he said, a little impatiently, and taking up a ruler that lay on the table, and playing with it restlessly.

Her head sank on her bosom, the light dying out of her eyes.

"I know you did—you said words that were as cruel as an adder's sting, and that cut me like sharp knives, and if I had had a pistol in my hand at the time I should have shot you dead for saying them!" she muttered. "But since then my little baby has been born, and it has your eyes, Gilbert, and when I looked into them I forgot your cruelty, and only remembered that you had loved me once, and that, perhaps, in spite of what has passed,

you would love me again, and make me your wife, for the sake of our boy."

She caught his hand and held it tightly, as if determined he should not escape her, but should hear all she had to say, while his eyebrows met together in a heavy frown across his forehead, and with his free hand he drummed against the table with the ebony ruler. He did not speak for a few minutes, and she pursued the advantage she fancied he had gained.

"Ah! Gilbert, you will marry me at last!" she exclaimed, her voice quivering with triumph; "you said you would when I consented to leave my home for you, and you will keep your promise. I will be such a good wife," she added, with piteous eagerness. "I will never do or say a thing to vex you—I will conquer my bad temper, and you shall never see me in a passion again—I—"

He made an imperative gesture for silence, which she obeyed, while every limb trembled with the excitement under which she had spoken. It was evident she was a woman of very nervous temperament, and entirely swayed by her emotions while they lasted—equally patent was the fact that this man had taken such a hold on her affections that she was utterly powerless to resist the impulse that made his presence a necessity to her, and which had driven her back to him after he had sent her away with cold looks and harsher words.

"I thought," he said, after a pause, and speaking with deliberation, "I thought the last time we met I told you that I was very willing to make you an allowance, but that all our former relations must come to an end. Nothing has happened since then to induce me to alter my decision."

"Yes! something has happened," she interrupted, "my baby has been born—your son, Gilbert."

"I do not see how that affects the question, except that I am willing to increase the promised amount," he responded, coldly. "Listen to me, Joyce, and do not interrupt me until I have finished. It is quite impossible I can marry you—our relative positions forbid it."

"You did not say that when you were courting me!" she broke in, passionately, and heedless of his caution; "you were willing enough to promise anything then!"

"Well, you see, I was, or fancied myself, in love with you, and one says a good deal one doesn't mean under those circumstances, and for the sake of pretty face."

"It is pretty no longer?"

"No," he retorted, regarding her critically. "It is certainly very different from what it was, but I expect you have been crying, and making a fool of yourself generally, without remembering that tears wash away beauty—you'll be all right after a little while, and get your old looks back again—" he did not in the least believe it, but he thought it better to pacify her vanity, which his first admission might have wounded. "Now I want to come to a clear understanding with you so that there may be no mistake in future, as there has been to-day. Firstly then, let me impress upon you the fact that you must not force yourself into my presence, for it is an impossibility that we can ever be more to each other than friends, and we shall not even be that unless you are reasonable. As I told you before, I am willing to make you an allowance—"

"Yes," she interrupted again, "you offered me money, and I throw it back in your face."

"I know you did," he quietly acquiesced, "but since then you have had time for reflection, and I don't suppose you will be such a fool now."

"And do you think your gold will compensate for the loss of your affection?"

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I really cannot say, looking at it from your point of view, but if I gave my own personal opinion, I should answer 'Yes!' The fact is, Joyce, I do not care for you any longer—it may

be brutal to tell you this, but it is far better to speak plainly than to let you go on believing yourself—your vile temper and reproaches swept away all the love I once bore you, and now, the only thing I am willing to do, is to make you an allowance of a hundred-and-fifty pounds a year—a fortune to a woman of your station."

She rose up and faced him, her eyes flashing her lips full of a fiery, impatient scorn, her attitude instinct with defiance.

"And I tell you I will not accept it! Low as I have fallen, I have not come to such a depth as you would force me into, and while I have strength to work, I will never be beholden to you for a penny piece—me, or my boy. I came to you full of love that had outlasted shame and anguish, and had mastered even my own resolution; but I go away full of hate, and my only hope now is, that I may sometime avenge my wrongs, and make you suffer as you have made me."

Saying which, she dropped her veil, and went out into the crowded street, where she was soon lost to view in the busy throngs that were hurrying to and fro.

Farquhar sat still for a few minutes after she had left, and seemed to be pondering.

"I'm glad she is gone—she is a capricious, uncomfortable sort of woman, whom one is never sure of," he muttered to himself at length; "and I always had a queer fancy that she might do me some mischief, if she had a chance. Well, I made her a fair offer, and if she chooses to refuse it, it's her fault, not mine—I can't run after her, and implore her to accept the money, and after all, I was willing to treat her well, if she would have let me—it was all her infernal temper—"

Mr. Farquhar's meditations came to an abrupt conclusion, for he jumped up hastily, put on his hat and went out.

Was he trying to escape from that uncomfortable thing we call "conscience?"

CHAPTER XV.

"Do you think I have sufficiently profited by my lessons in sculling as to be able to manage a boat myself?" asked Adrienne, one morning, as she and Otho Lynwood strolled idly along towards the river.

"I should imagine so; you seem to have got on very rapidly."

"Then I think I shall take the Water-Lily out for an hour or two; I am anxious to test my powers."

"Which is to say, you are willing to dispense with my company!" laughed the young man.

"I did not mean that," said Lady Lynwood, blushing; "but I thought I heard you say you were going to be busy this morning."

"So I am. I ought to be writing letters at the present moment, in fact; but the temptation of a walk with you was too strong for me."

"Then I shall only be doing my duty by sending you back."

"At least, let me start you on your expedition before I am banished," he said, and when they got to the boathouse he drew the Water-Lily from her nook, and proceeded to arrange the cushions and make all provisions for her occupier's comfort; then he helped Adrienne in, and put the sculls ready for her use.

"Which way shall I go?" she asked, looking up at him with her lovely blue eyes, under whose innocent gaze his own shifted uneasily. "I have never been down the river yet, so perhaps I had better go up, as I know my way."

Otho pulled his moustache, and seemed to be lost in thought, while his eyes were fixed on the ground in a meditative manner, that the triviality of the question to be decided hardly seemed to warrant.

"It seems quite a momentous issue!" laughed Adrienne, who was in particularly good spirits—perhaps at the prospect of being

alone, for solitude was a luxury seldom accorded her, and she enjoyed it in proportion to its novelty.

"I was only wondering which would be easier pulling for you," he responded, "and I think you will enjoy it better if you go down, for the current is not so strong here as it is higher up."

"But then, I don't know my way down, as I said before," she demurred.

"There is nothing to know—there are no backwaters for some distance, so you will float quite easily down the main stream, and it won't be such hard work for you coming back. Nevertheless, pray do as you like," he added, hastily, and with a slight smile; "perhaps if you go towards King's Dene you may meet Lionel Egerton on the bank."

Something in his tone made her look up in a quick, half-startled manner, but he did not return her gaze, and she said at once,—

"I shall take your advice, and go on an exploring expedition in an unknown country. Meanwhile, pray for my safe return," laughing.

"That, you may rest assured, I shall do," he responded, and Adrienne dipped her sculls into the water, and went floating down the stream, looking like a lovely incarnation of the spring in its fresh beauty.

Otho watched her until she was out of sight, and then turned round, and walked slowly back towards the Hall, very thoughtfully pulling his moustache the while.

On the terrace outside the house he met Sir Ralph.

"I thought you had gone out with your steward," he observed, as he joined him.

"Yes; I went over some of the land with him, and told him what trees I wanted felled, but I didn't feel much inclination for walking, so I left him on the understanding that I should give him the rest of my instructions to-morrow," replied the Baronet.

"It is certainly rather warm for walking," Otho remarked, absently.

"Where is Adrienne?" inquired Sir Ralph.

"I left her, not half-an-hour ago, down by the river. She wanted to be alone, so she banished me, and I obediently carried out her wishes."

Sir Ralph laughed.

"I think she contrives to have all her wishes gratified—at least, I do my best to fulfil them. You and she seem to get on very well together."

"We do, I am happy to say; but, really, it would be almost an impossibility not to get on with her—she is so sweet and charming."

"I am, indeed, rejoiced to hear you say so," exclaimed his uncle, eagerly. "I was afraid," he added, in a more hesitating manner, "that perhaps you might have a prejudice against her—it would have been only natural if you had."

Otho was silent a moment, then he looked up, and met Sir Ralph's gaze.

"I will be candid with you, and confess that you are right. I certainly did start with a prejudice against her, and, as you say, it was only natural; for, of course, I in common with other people, could not respect a young girl who, we fancied, had married for the sake of money and a title"—he was looking fixedly at his uncle as he said this, and he saw the Baronet wince under his words, as if a sudden pain had caught him. "However, I am glad to say my prejudice has vanished under the influence of her charms, and I acknowledge myself one of the most devoted of her slaves."

Sir Ralph did not speak for some time. He knew quite well what people had said regarding the motives which had actuated his young bride in her marriage, but, for all that, it was none the pleasanter to hear them spoken of. He would fain have forgotten the difference in their ages, have persuaded himself that she forgot it too, and that her love for him was of the same nature as his for her, and it was not agreeable to be reminded of the extreme improbability of his wishes. Perhaps he was in a slight degree irritated with his nephew, and

this fact may have induced him to broach a subject which he felt Otho would hardly enjoy discussing.

"I am going to make my will," he said. "I never did it before, for if anything had happened to me you would have been my heir, and there was no one else to whom I desired to leave anything. As you seem to think Adrienne made a sacrifice in marrying me, it is only just that she should be amply compensated for it when she becomes a widow," he added, with a touch of satire in his voice. "I earnestly hope Heaven will bless us with children, and in that case my eldest son will, of course, inherit the title and all my landed property—not that I shall forget you, Otho. It is my intention to leave you the sum of thirty thousand pounds, which will bring you in a very decent annual income, and enable you to live as a gentleman; while, if I have no son, the title will go to you, and certain estates with it, but I shall leave Lynwood Hall to Adrienne for her life, and also give her a life interest in the lands belonging to it."

Otho did not immediately reply, but kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and, after a slight pause, Sir Ralph said,—

"What do you think of my testamentary intentions?"

"I think they are extremely fair—even generous, so far as I am concerned," he replied, slowly; "but you have always proved yourself so liberal towards me that I felt sure you would continue to be so. Nevertheless, I thank you very heartily."

The Baronet involuntarily breathed a sigh of relief. He had wished his nephew to know in what terms he purposed making his will, but had hitherto refrained from mentioning the subject, as he intuitively felt it could scarcely prove a pleasant one for the man who had for so long regarded himself as his heir.

"Ah! there is Egerton coming up the avenue," he said, glad to change the conversation.

"He seems to have taken a great fancy to Lynwood Hall of late," observed the officer, with a sneer he was unable to repress; "he is here nearly every day."

"It is at your invitation," retorted the Baronet, sharply.

Otho shrugged his shoulders.

"It was at first, but now he has become so entirely *un ami de la maison* that he does not wait for an invitation."

"He is quite right. Formalities between such near neighbours and old friends as the Egertons and myself are absurd, and I am delighted to see them dispensed with."

"Oh! of course. I quite agree with you. Besides, Lionel Egerton would be an acquisition anywhere—he is so handsome, and genial, and an athlete into the bargain. Adrienne owes her skill at tennis and boating entirely to his instruction. He will be disappointed not to find her at home."

If he were he did not say so, for after inquiring how she was, he did not mention her name again, but announced some message from his father as the reason of his visit; and presently Otho withdrew into the library.

Once he felt himself alone, the feelings he had been careful to repress in his uncle's presence found vent, and a change that was perfectly marvellous in its rapidity came over his face, the stereotyped smile it had formerly worn giving place to an expression of most deadly hatred and malignity.

He seated himself in a chair, but his excitement would not allow him to remain there, and presently he got up, and paced swiftly up and down the room.

"Fool, idiot that he is to imagine I should be content with a paltry thirty thousand pounds while *she* has the estates," he muttered, half audibly; "I, who have always looked upon myself as their prospective master; I, who, by every law of justice, should be their master, to consent to this chit of a girl having them! It is abominable, monstrous!"

For some time his agitation prevented his

thinking calmly, but after awhile he made a great effort to obtain his self-possession, and partly succeeded.

He resumed his seat in front of the library table, and mentally went over all Sir Ralph had said during their interview.

Briefly, it resolved itself into this: If the Baronet had children, as it was probable enough he would, all Otho could expect would be thirty thousand pounds; and if he died childless, then the title would go to the young man, and those estates that went with it. These latter were very few, producing at most an income of about three thousand a-year, and did not include Lynwood Hall, which was to belong to Adrienne for life.

"Which means that I shall never have it," he muttered, savagely. "Besides being more than ten years younger than I am, her constitution is superb, and, *barring accidents*, she will probably live to be an old woman, while I shall certainly not reach the age of three score and ten years—I have not taken enough care of myself for that—so that unless she dies without children I must make up my mind to letting Lynwood Hall go from me. Thirty thousand pounds! I wonder how far that would go with my creditors. If they only knew my kind uncle's intentions, they would be down on me like a flock of ravening wolves, eager for their prey."

He smiled grimly at the thought, and continued his meditations.

"My only security lies in her death, and stranger things have happened than that a girl of eighteen should die—life is uncertain at the best of times, as we all know. Suppose—a strange smile hovered on his lips—"suppose, for instance, she should be brought in this very evening, drowned—how odd it would be, and yet how natural! She goes out in a boat alone, on a part of the river that is known to be dangerous, and with a very imperfect knowledge of rowing, and an inability to swim a stroke; something touches the little skiff, and it upsets, leaving her struggling in the water; it is a lonely place, no help is near, and my lady is drowned. The story has been acted over and over again, and another repetition could hardly occasion surprise. People would sigh, and say it was sad, and Adrienne, Lady Lynwood, would lie in the vault with her husband's ancestors, while I should resume my old position as her husband's heir."

CHAPTER XVI.

No thought of possible harm entered Adrienne's head, as she floated down the stream, on whose surface the broad lily leaves lay, and in which the willows on the margin, mirrored themselves as their long tresses drooped gracefully downwards until they touched the water.

Otho had not been far out in his suggestion of her wish to banish him, for as a matter of fact, she infinitely preferred her own society to his on that particular morning. Witty and amusing as he was, there were yet certain chords in his nature that jarred upon her, and of late she had had a great deal of his company, for he had been constantly at her side.

There was no need for her to row, for the current was strong enough to carry her along as fast as she wished to go, so she let the sculls lie idly in the rowlocks, and drifted quietly down, watching the osier-fringed banks slide past, and catching sight, every now and then, of a smooth brown body, and a pair of bright eyes, amongst the rushes—a rat reconnoitring, and scudding swiftly back to his hole as he found his privacy invaded.

She was thinking what a change these few last months had wrought in her destiny, and telling herself how good and kind Sir Ralph was to her, and how fortunate she had been to find such a protector. If she had not been befriended by him, she would have had to drudge on through life as a governess—there would have been no youth, no hope, no brightness in such a fate, and he had rescued her from it, and given her all that luxurious wealth could procure, added to an untiring devotion.

If she had been more given to introspection, she might have wondered at the peculiar assistance with which she repeated to herself all Sir Ralph had done for her, as if she would force herself to be grateful, and compel a love that would not come spontaneously; but—young, and innocent as she was—she was only conscious of a vague uneasiness—a regret not only that she could not sufficiently repay her husband's devotion, but that she did not even give him as much as was in her power.

Brought face to face with her own sensations, she was bound to confess that was not thoroughly happy—that she was not even as happy as she had been on the borders of the Mediterranean, when she and Sir Ralph were alone; and yet, for all that, she felt older, and more fully capable of appreciating happiness in the abstract; she was developing in every way, and a deeper comprehension of life, and its manifold joys and sorrows, had taken possession of her.

Perhaps this latter fact was due to her intercourse with Lionel Egerton, whose ideas and opinions so entirely coincided with her own, and in whose society she felt more thoroughly at home than she had ever felt with anyone else—even her own father.

"I wonder how it is," she mused, as she drifted down in the solitude and glory of the summer morning, whose stillness was only broken by the songs of birds, or the occasional lowing of cattle.

"Even the first day I spoke to him, I did not feel at all as if he were a stranger, and now I have a sort of idea, sometimes, that he understands my thoughts even before they are uttered. I am never afraid of telling him what I feel."

This was true, and many dim poetic fancies, that she had carefully hidden away in the inmost recesses of her maiden soul, had come to light under the influence of Lionel's sympathy—she was so sure he would never laugh at her as "romantic"—that he would comprehend her meaning, even though it were veiled in the vaguest of language—in point of fact there was a bond of union between them that both were conscious of, and that neither attempted to analyse.

She was thinking of him in a dreamy, meditative sort of way, as she had lately got into the habit of doing, when suddenly she became aware that the boat was drifting much faster than it had hitherto done, and that the current had grown a great deal stronger. The water, too, was less placid looking, and seemed to be hurrying impetuously forward.

Adrienne came out of her reverie very quickly and changed her seat—for up to the present she had been sitting in the stern with the steering-ropes over her shoulders.

Now she seized the sculls, and, by backing water, endeavoured to hold the boat up; but her efforts were useless, the current was too strong to be resisted, and she could not even guide her frail little skiff to the bank.

At the same moment a large board, with the word "Danger!" printed in big letters, attracted her attention, and a noise, as of rushing waters, sounded in her ears.

Involuntarily she dropped the sculls and looked round, and then she saw in front the stream foaming over a few stakes that were all the protection left against a weir, which, as a matter of fact—although she did not know it—was one of the most dangerous on the river.

But although she was unaware of its reputation she was not ignorant of the extent of her own peril, and a sudden deadly sickness fell upon her, making her brain whirl in a dizzy effort to prevent herself from fainting.

She looked hopelessly round and endeavoured to cry out and attract attention, but her voice deserted her, and she only made an articulate sound that ended in a low wail, as she slipped from her seat and crouched down in the bottom of the boat utterly inert and despairing.

A thousand thoughts flashed through her brain with lightning-like rapidity in those few

awful moments. Must she die—she who was so young—on whose brow the roses of eighteen summers had not yet faded—she who ought to have revelled in life as a butterfly revels in the sunshine?

Oh! the thought was awful, awful! and yet the doom hung over her, and no effort on her own part could prevent it, for her little skiff would be instantly dashed to pieces in those foaming waters and she herself must drown!

A rapid phantasmagoria passed before her eyes. She saw herself at school in the Belgian capital—she saw Sir Ralph as he appeared before her on the first occasion of their meeting—she saw Otho Lynwood with a smile that seemed to mock her—and then Lionel Egerton rose before her mental vision, and involuntarily she clasped her hands together and uttered his name.

"If he were here—if he were only here to save me!" broke from her white lips, in an anguish deeper than she had ever before experienced.

Life is so sweet to us—so sweet! Yes, even when clouds lower round us, and a dark veil shrouds the future in its impenetrable folds—how much more, then, when blue skies are above and the glory of youth's sunshine plays about our feet?

It is so hard to relinquish the hold we have on existence, and to realise the fact that in a few hours—in a few minutes—we shall have yielded it up, and the great world will go on "spinning down the groove of change"; but, so far as we are concerned, it will have come to an end.

The tide of life will ebb and flow as before, bearing on its bosom the weal or woe of humanity. But what will it have to do with us when once heart and brain are stilled?

These thoughts did not shape themselves into words, but they flashed like fire on poor Adrienne's consciousness, while a deadly chill of fear at facing that terrible *Unknown* took hold upon her like an icy hand.

Innocent as she was, and stainless as was her conscience, she experienced that purely human terror of Death, which assails us all—the darkness and silence and chill touched her, and she shuddered at what must follow.

(To be continued.)

SINNED AGAINST.

—o—

CHAPTER XVI.—(continued).

"CAN I see Mrs. Russell?" Bertram asked, gravely.

There was no demur now. He was shown into the little parlour.

Mrs. Russell sat in a low chair by the fire. Bertram thought he had never seen anyone so fearfully altered. She seemed suddenly grown old, and she started on his entrance as though struck with some sudden pain.

"I hope you have not forgotten me?"

The widow trembled like an aspen leaf.

"I never forget old faces."

"I have come on a very grave errand," said Bertram, eagerly. "Mrs. Russell, I want my wife."

"Your wife?"

"I should have said my future wife. Mrs. Russell, I love your niece with passionate affection. I can make her Lady Bertram and give her almost princely wealth. You will not refuse me May?"

"I cannot refuse her to you."

"You will let me see her?"

"She is not here."

"Not here!"

"I have not seen her for months—not since a day last May. She left Acacia Villa suddenly while I was absent. I have never seen or heard of her since."

"Never!"

"Never once. I thought at the time you were concerned in her going."

Sir Bertram looked full into her face.

"I was concerned in it. I travelled to Lon-

don in her company, but—I mean she determined to return to you. She took a ticket for Easton. She actually commenced the journey."

"She never came."

Sir Bertram lost his self-command. He let his true feeling, his great conflict, appear in his agonized voice.

"I know I have behaved badly—I know I have no claim on your forbearance, but I loved May as my own soul! Mrs. Russell, if you have a grain of womanly compassion in your heart, tell me where she is!"

"I cannot!—I cannot!"

"Ay!" she said, bitterly, "I know you think I was harsh and cruel to May—that I made her days one long misery! Perhaps I did; but, oh! I have been punished! I slighted May because I was jealous for my own daughter. I sacrificed May that Margaret should strive, and I am rightly punished. My daughter has deserted me! She knows I have not very long to live, but she will not come home to these my last days! I have lost her more completely than if she were dead, and day and night I have May's face haunting me!"

"You think she is dead?"

"Ay!"

"But why?"

"May was not made to fight her own way—she was too fair and innocent. For weeks after she went I used to search the papers to see if I could find any clue to her fate; but all these months I have heard nothing, and at last it came home to me with an awful certainty that she was dead!"

"Dead!"

"Just that! Sir Bertram, I would give the whole world to know I was mistaken! I think no sound on earth could be so precious to me as to hear that girl's voice pronounce my pardon."

Sir Bertram stayed a few moments longer. He strove by every means in his power to induce Mrs. Russell to throw some light on the mystery of her niece's fate; but at last it dawned on him she had spoken the simple truth.

May had buried her sorrow among strangers rather than return to the cold shelter of her aunt's house.

He did not stay in Mackstone. What was the use? He was angry with the fate which hid his darling from him; but he felt certain she was not dead. He would not accept her aunt's dictum that May's sorrows were over.

"We shall meet some day," he said to himself. "My May-blossom will yet return to me. The sweet child I lured from her home shall yet spread sunshine over my life."

But the time passed on, and Sir Bertram was no nearer. He haunted the London streets; he visited all the great haunts for feminine industry. He saw many worn and weary women, and some of them had sad, wistful faces; but the face he sought for was not there—his May-blossom was not among them.

And then, when the London season was at its height, his mother besought him to give up his gloomy misanthropical habits, and at least be present at a ball given in honour of his youngest sister.

Bertram yielded from sheer fatigue of being importuned, but he was hardly an addition to the festivities.

He stood tall, grave, and handsome, leaning against the wall a model of gloomy preoccupation until towards midnight; then, suddenly raising his eyes, he saw a graceful, sylph-like creature, clad in long floating robes of white billowy satin, leaning on the arm of a general, whose heart was positively loaded with orders and decorations. Then, as he gazed on the sweet, wistful face, an intense deep joy filled Bertram's heart. His long, weary search was ended. This was his May-blossom. With an eager bound he stepped forward, saying, in a tone of repressed emotion,—

"We do not need an introduction."

The General, imagining the two were old

friends met after long absence, resigned May's hand just as the band struck up the strains of a dreamy German waltz.

CHAPTER XVII.

Sir Bertram had no intention of dancing that waltz—only a brief turn or two; and he led his partner to a fragrant conservatory, his mother's pride and hobby. Here he placed a chair for her in front of a tall arum lily, and then the pent-up passion at his heart found height.

"My dearest!" he said, "my sweet May-blossom!—you no word of greeting for me? I have seen you long and fruitlessly; how could you leave me?"

Every vestige of colour had faded from her face.

"Hush," she whispered, "you must not speak like this, it is cruel."

"You don't understand," he retorted, eagerly. "I can guess the reason which made you leave my side; it no longer exists."

"It existed then?"

"Yes," he answered, unable to withstand the searching of her clear eyes. "But, May, I never meant to wrong you—you were young and unhappy. I fancied love would make up to you for all."

Love had made up to her for all; perfect happiness had been the portion of the three months' wife, disturbed by only one awful fear—that some day Sir Bertram would appear again, and Lord St. John discover the secret, and learn that his idolised bride was the lonely girl he had rescued from shame and misery not yet a year ago.

"Leave me," she pleaded.

"I will never leave you. You are mine; in Heaven's sight you have been my wife for months."

She shuddered.

"You don't know what you say!"

"I do; you are mine. No earthly power can separate us, May. For time and eternity you belong to me!"

She gave a faint gasping cry. Sir Bertram turned round; on the threshold of the conservatory, his face turned towards them, stood May's husband; there was no telling how much he had overheard.

The girl shivered, but the man of the world quietly recovered his self-possession; even yet he had no suspicion of the tie between these two.

"Ha! St. John, you have to-night; my mother ought to feel herself flattered. You used to esteem balls as thoroughly as myself."

Stuart smiled; however much he had overheard, whatever he suspected, he put a brave face on it.

"You see I have a new temptation to draw me to such scenes; I do not like my wife to mingle in them alone."

"Your wife!"

Stuart took May's ice-cold hand in his.

"Allow me to perform the introduction in correct fashion—Sir Bertram Danvers, Lady St. John. May, I am sure you are tired; would you like to go home?"

"Yes," breathed his wife, faintly, feeling anything in the world better than remaining between these two who had both so strangely influenced her life. "I am very tired."

Sir Bertram recovered himself.

"And you are really a Benedict! Of course you'll invite me to visit you for 'Auld lang syne,' Stuart?"

"Of course," returned the peer. "Come, May, my child, how you shiver!"

"The wind is so keen," murmured his wife.

He put her in the carriage, he covered her with her opera cloak, but he did not take his seat beside her. He merely gave the order "Home" to the footman, and stood on the broad stone steps while his wife was driven rapidly away.

His conflict was as sharp as May's; he knew perfectly her secret—he knew the part

Sir Bertram had played in her life—and now the baronet was free.

An awful fear seized on Stuart. Had he dealt May a cruel wrong? ought she to have been left unfettered? would she covet her freedom now her first love was restored to her? The thought was misery to him; he loved the gentle, girlish creature he had married with all his soul. They had been so happy, too. Alas! alas! had he already come to speak of his bliss in the past tense?

"If only she had told me," he murmured to himself. "If only she had put her hand in mine and whispered her secret I shouldn't have felt afraid—but now."

He went back to the gay scene, though it had lost all its attractions for him. He danced, he talked as one of the gayest there, but all the time his wife's sweet face rose up before him—all the time his thoughts were with May in the pretty bijou villa he had hired in Mayfair, that his little bride might enjoy a glimpse of the London season.

Theirs had been such a short courtship, and an even briefer engagement. He had loved her from the moment he recognised in General Anstruther's adopted daughter the child he had saved from a cruel wrong. He had loved her, and he believed his love returned; only in all these months of wedlock she had never sobbed out her secret in his arms, only now he found her white and stricken, talking to the man who had once been his rival.

"I can't doubt her," was Stuart's decision. "It would break my heart. Oh! May, my wife! my darling! I don't think I could live with a distrustful thought of you."

The early morn was breaking when he reached home; his own man was sitting up for him, and put a telegram into his hands. A strange presentiment of evil came to Stuart as he held it in his grasp; it took a few seconds to enable him to open it.

This was what he read:

"Mrs. Russell, Acacia-villa, Mackstone; to Lord St. John, Holly-lodge, Mayfair. You promised once to come to me if I needed a friend. They tell me I am dying, and with my last breath I beg you come."

Stuart never thought of a refusal. He had not seen much of his cousin Margaret lately—he knew that the foreign tour under Lady Manners's chaperonage had not been productive of any results matrimonial, and the heiress had been preparing with great enjoyment for the season. She had been presented, and attracted no little attention, but the very day he and his bride returned to England the fashionable newspapers chronicled the departure of Miss St. John for her country seat; therefore he had no chance of presenting her to his wife, and May had heard very little of the stately heiress.

From this telegram he augured the breach between Miss St. John and her foster-mother had grown wider. Mrs. Russell would hardly have telegraphed to a stranger if her adopted child had been at her side.

Lord St. John caught up a *Bradshaw*, and turned over its pages.

Yes, by starting almost immediately he could catch the earliest parliamentary train to Mackstone; it would save over two hours.

Noiselessly—subduing his footsteps for the sake of his sleeping wife—he reached his dressing-room, made a rapid change of attire, and returned to swallow a cup of coffee and a biscuit before the dogcart came round to drive him to the terminus.

"Tell your lady I shall be home late tonight," he directed the footman. "I have been summoned to Mackstone on urgent business."

We have already said it was a parliamentary train, and stopped at every station.

It came on Stuart with a thrill of pain when he saw the name Aston written up.

Surely that was the name of the place to which he had taken May's ticket on that strange spring day, eleven months ago!

She had said her aunt lived there. She had never mentioned this aunt to him since. For

all she had said since their marriage she might have spent her whole previous life as General Anstruther's petted darling.

Every blind was lowered when he reached Acacia Villa. Alas! even before he rang the bell he knew he had come too late.

"My mistress went last night, my lord," said a respectable-looking woman. "She waited and watched for you as long as she knew anything. She was quite unconscious at the last."

"Is Miss St. John here?"

The woman shook her head.

"Many's the time Mrs. Russell sent for her, my lord, but she'd always some excuse ready. Miss St. John may be a rich lady, but she'd not a scrap of feeling for anyone but herself."

Stuart looked troubled.

"I ask your pardon, my lord, if she's a relation of yours; but it makes my blood boil to see how she's treated the poor mistress."

Lord St. John sighed.

"Then she was quite alone?"

"Quite."

"I wish I had got here sooner."

The woman shook her head.

"She tried to make up her mind again and again to send the telegram, but something always prevented her. She'd had it written out for days, but she would not let me touch it. At last, when she was asleep yesterday, I took and sent the girl off with it to the post-office, but it was too late; before you could have got it she was gone."

"But you say she watched for me."

"She had something to tell you, my lord; and I fancy she hoped you'd come without being sent for. I know she wanted you, but some scruple she had held her back from sending for you."

Lord St. John gave a few simple orders for the funeral, asked and obtained his cousin's present whereabouts, and was thinking of leaving when the servant begged him to take a last look at the deceased.

Stuart hesitated.

"We were almost strangers," he said, gently; "and I am not fond of such visits."

"It was her last wish, my lord. Her last words to me were, if you came, I was to ask you to go into her room."

"But—"

"She must have had a meaning in it, my lord; and I promised."

The woman's superstition was evidently such that she was incapable of understanding his refusal.

To cross the wishes of the dead was to incur little short of presumption. Stuart found she would take no denial, and so he yielded.

There was nothing terrible or awful in the sight, only in the still thin fingers was clenched a letter which bore his own name.

Lord St. John understood. She had committed her last charge to paper, and fancied he would respect it more if delivered in this peculiar manner.

The servant pointed to the letter, and the young nobleman possessed himself of it. He would not gratify the abigail's curiosity by opening it. Then he merely repeated his orders, and in a few moments left the house, bearing with him the missive still sealed.

Not until he was in a smoking-carriage, the door locked against all intruders, did he break the seal. He had very little curiosity about Mrs. Russell's communication. It was most likely some direction about Margaret; and Lord St. John had very little interest in his kinswoman—one single side of a sheet of writing-paper, closely covered in a fine old-fashioned hand.

"Lord St. John—I have wronged you deeply, but before you read this I shall be no more, and I think you are too brave and generous to be angry with the dead. I had thought to take my secret with me, but it is beyond my strength. I cannot die with this guilt upon my soul."

"All that your late kinsman left behind him is yours, for Lady Manners is dead, and Margaret is my own child. My title was true

in part—only in part. Lord St. John's daughter was brought up by me. She grew up side by side with Margaret, but there was scant kindness shown her after my husband died. I never cared for anyone but my own daughter. Little May was neglected and put upon till she became little better than a house-hold drudge.

"And our cruelty drove her desperate. Child as she was she had a lover. She left us with him. She carried with her a little leather-case, with a letter from her father. I mourned over that. I thought she might find out the story of her birth and bring Lord St. John's vengeance on us. I need not have troubled. Sorrow killed her. The man who loved her had a living wife. Little May learnt the truth, and left him within a few hours of her arrival in London. This much he told me with his own lips. He is a rich man; and has spent money like water in the search. If May were in this world he must have found her. She is dead! The girl the world calls Miss St. John is Margaret Russell! All that seems hers is yours. I can give you ample proofs of this. Ask—(here some names and addresses followed)—they will tell you Meg is my own child. Some can prove to you her resemblance to me as they knew me first.

"It was my scheme—not hers. I only deserve the blame. Be pitiful—be merciful to Meg. I have suffered so much—surely I have blotted out the sin? Do not punish her for the fault of her unfortunate mother,

"MATILDA RUSSELL."

Stuart St. John started. He never doubted the letter. Its every word found an echo in his own heart. He would have staked his very life on its truth.

His whole heart had gone out to May. He had never felt anything but repulsion for Margaret St. John. The strange shadowy resemblance of his wife to Alix was plain now. "My darling!" he murmured, fondly, "strange! I never thought of it before. How marvellous that I should have married the lonely child left by her father's will to my guardianship!"

And here he sighed heavily. He was thinking of Bertram Danvers and the shadow he seemed to have cast over May's pathway. Stuart loved her so fondly, so devotedly, he could not bear to think that anyone else had ever enjoyed her love. He wanted his wife's whole heart. It was torture to him to think there was a secret chamber in it locked against him.

His thoughts were very full of May, but he never thought of returning to his own house. He had not seen his wife since he met her ~~the other~~ with Sir Bertram. He shrank strangely from his next meeting with her. The news he had just heard was so startling, so wonderful, he could not keep it to himself. He deemed it almost a providence when the first person he encountered on the platform at Charing-Cross was Dr. West.

"You look fagged to death," said the old Doctor, reproving. "I am afraid you have been dancing till daybreak, my lord."

Stuart smiled.

"Worse than that, doctor. I have not been in bed all night. When I got home I found a telegram summoning me to Mackstone."

"How very strange!"

"Why?"

"I have just dispatched a telegram to Mackstone. I never heard of the place before to-day. I am told of it by two people."

"It's a very small place."

"Ah!"

"Why do you look at me like that, West? Is there anything the matter?"

"I was wondering if you were afraid of infection."

"Infection?"

"Yea. It's a plain question enough, my lord."

"I can't conceive your object in asking."

"I will tell you. I have a patient I par-

ticularly wish you to see, but she is suffering from smallpox."

"I don't think I have a taste for visiting such people. I was sent for to Mackstone for a similar purpose, but I arrived too late."

"Ah!"

"I wish you would not be so mysterious."

"Have you seen your kinswoman lately?"

"No."

"Heard of her?"

"Nothing particular."

"She came to town three days ago, suffering from some strange indisposition. She only called for me yesterday, and now she is in danger of her life—malignant smallpox of the greatest virulence."

A sudden thought struck Stuart.

"You weren't going to send for Mrs. Russell. I hope that wasn't your telegram?"

"Indeed it was."

"It will be useless."

"I don't think so."

"I am sure of it."

"Of course we all know Miss St. John treated her shamefully, but women are very forgiving."

"Yes."

"Besides, my lord, I have shrewd suspicions the tie between Miss St. John and Mrs. Russell is far stronger than we supposed. I fancy you have been the victim of a clever fraud, and the girl palmed off on you as the late baron's daughter is Mrs. Russell's own child."

"What makes you think so?"

"There always seemed to me a resemblance between them. As an invalid with her hair undressed Miss St. John bears the strongest possible likeness to Mrs. Russell. Besides, in her delirium she is always calling on her. She lies moaning for her mother. She will be good. She will do anything if only her mother will come. She will give up her riches and be poor again. She will even go back to Mackstone if only her mother will forgive her."

"Poor girl!"

"I think it's true, my lord; if so, she's the most arrant impostor."

"But she is to be pitied!"

"I don't see why."

"The mother on whom she calls can never come to her; I have just returned from Mrs. Russell's deathbed. I have in my pocket her confession of the fraud you have so cleverly detected."

"Good gracious! Then it's all true?"

"Perfectly true that Margaret St. John has never really owned that name."

"Then if poor Lady Manners had only lived everything would have come to her?"

"No, to my wife. It seems incredible, does it not, West?—but, according to Mrs. Russell's confession, I have married Lord St. John's heiress!"

The doctor stared.

"Then you need not come with me. I thought you ought to hear that poor thing's ravings, but if you know it all without there's no need."

"I don't want to see her if I can help it. I feel too full of indignation for the way she treated her mother."

"Poor girl! There doesn't seem a soul to care whether she lives or dies."

"She has brought it on herself."

"There's many of us might own to having caused our troubles, but I doubt if that makes them easier to bear. You're a young man, my lord, and life has gone smoothly with you; you can't understand what it is to have a yearning at your heart ungratified."

It dawned on Stuart with a pang; his lot had been singularly prosperous, no trouble had ever crossed it. He was not a superstitious man, and yet he shivered as the fancy crossed his mind; he might have exhausted the sunshine of life, and be preparing to meet its frowns. He dismissed the idea as ridiculous, took leave of Dr. West, and drove rapidly in the direction of his own home, but there was a heavy load at his heart for all that.

CHAPTER XVIII. AND LAST.

LADY ST. JOHN awoke the next morning with a strange sense of something terrible having happened. Only too soon memory returned to her, only too soon that scene in the conservatory came back to her. She knew the shadow she had always feared had fallen.

"If I had only told him!" murmured the girl to herself. "He loved me so—he must have forgiven me, but now he will find out my secret for himself, and be angry with me. Oh! Stuart, my darling! what will my life be like when I have lost you?"

The maid came in with a dainty tray of breakfast.

May raised herself heavily on one arm—the feet tired and languid from her restless, troubled slumbers, hardly fit for the exertions of another day.

"I meant to get up to breakfast."

"It is so late, my lady."

"Late!"

"Past ten, my lady."

"Past ten! Why I was to have gone out with Lord St. John at eleven."

"His lordship is not at home, my lady."

"When did he go?"

"James gave him a telegram when he returned, my lady, and he left word he might not be home till late. I think it must have been important, for my lord wouldn't take even half-an-hour's rest; he just changed his clothes and drove off."

"Where has he gone?"

"Shall I send James, my lady?"

"Yea."

But, oh! how she regretted the question when the girl came back.

"Lord St. John took a ticket for Mackstone, my lady."

Mackstone! Then he had guessed the truth! Mackstone! Then he had gone to find out the history of that hurried journey long ago! They would tell him it was all true; that his wife had left her home with a stranger, and he would realise that she was indeed the poor deluded girl he had rescued from Bertram Danvers.

"If I were only dead," thought the poor girl to herself. "He will never speak kindly to me, he will never look into my eyes with love again. Oh! Stuart, my darling, how gladly I would have died rather than lost your heart!"

The maid dressed her attentively, but May took no interest in what she wore—her heart ached too much to care for that. It seemed to her she had lived years since yesterday, and when she went downstairs the feeling was almost worse. She could settle to nothing; her misery took the form of restlessness—she wandered nervously from room to room, until at last she determined to go out.

Lady St. John usually drove in a pretty landau; besides, a pony carriage was kept for her sole use, but May felt in no humour for display to-day. In fancy she had gone back to the time when she was a lonely, neglected girl. Such a fate might, alas! be hers again. She could not bear to surround herself by any of the luxuries her husband had provided for her. She went upstairs and put on a plain, shady straw hat, took up a fan-shade, and started.

She cared little where she went, so that she met none of the fashionable friends whose compliments would have sounded such a mockery to her in her present mood. So she turned away from the crowded streets, and wandered on until she came to Kensington; and then, footsore and weary, she sank down on a bench in the beautiful shady gardens, almost worn out by fatigue.

She had chosen a secluded part of the spacious gardens, under a spreading tree, the soft wind blowing pleasantly in her face. May was quite cut off from all observers.

What should she do?

It was to puzzle out that question the young wife had come there. It seemed to May she could not confess her secret to her

husband—indeed, since he had gone to Mackstone probably he already knew it—his love would turn to scorn, he would despise her, all her dream of happiness was over.

"I will leave him," cried the poor girl, speaking aloud in her misery. "Better a thousand times I hide my broken heart away in some unknown refuge than that I linger at his side and know he has no love for me. Oh, yes, I will leave him, this very day he shall be free."

"But at what a cost! Oh, lady, have patience, however hard your lot. Stay at your husband's side; believe me, your misery will be all too cruel if you are parted from him."

May looked up.

All unseen by her someone had come to sit on the other end of her bench, and had involuntarily overheard her passionate outburst.

A slight, girlish-looking creature, with a wealth of golden hair, dressed so poorly as to suggest the utmost penury, so thin and sorrow-stricken as to call forth May's pity, and, child though she looked herself, holding in her arms a sleeping child.

May St. John was not selfish—the peculiar suffering of her childhood had softened her rather than made her thoughtless. At the sight of that fair, sorrowful-looking girl beside her, bearing her unconscious child, a great rush of pity filled her heart. She forgot the difference in their rank—she put aside her own misery in her desire to lighten ever so little the burden at her companion's heart.

"You are in trouble," she said, sweetly. "Can I help you?"

"Sore trouble."

"Let me help you?"

"No one can do that."

"Only let me try?"

The girl shook her head.

"It's one false step I'm mourning," she said, in a weary, far-off sort of voice; "one little year ago I was as happy as girl could be."

May might have answered one little day ago she, too, had been happy, but she forbore.

"Tell me," she urged; "perhaps I could help you."

"You have troubles too?"

"Aye, but no one could help me—my trouble is of my own making."

"And mine?"

"Tell me," urged May, going down and taking the thin fingers in her soft hand. "We are both in sorrow, that ought to be a bond between us."

A little pause, and the young mother burst into tears.

"You are rich and powerful, you can't tell what poverty means?"

"I think I can. One little year ago I had never possessed a sovereign of my own."

"And I have changed my last shilling. I came out to-day with a few pence in my pocket. I meant to buy peace for myself and my child; we are two too many for this great world, and I meant to rid it of one presence."

Her meaning dawned on May suddenly.

"You must not, no, you must not—think of your child. You must not take his life or soil your own with sin."

The other sighed.

"I am only nineteen, and yet I am old in sorrow. Twelve months ago I was a careless child."

"And you loved some one," whispered May, "it is always love changes our lives."

"I loved some one—Heaven help me! I thought he loved me back again. I lost my parents in one day; he said he would care for me while life should last; I believed him, and we were married."

"And he died," breathed May. "But, oh! be comforted, there are worse sorrows than death!"

"He did not die. I lost my fortune—I mean it never was mine, there was never a

will. He was a poor man for his position; he did not say even many words, but I was quick to see it—he wearied of me."

"He could not!"

"He did. I overheard him tell his mother our marriage was all a mistake. I thought then he should be free—just as you argued just now I argued—and I left him."

May threw her arms round the stranger.

"You left him?"

"Aye. I thought I could better bear my sorrow apart from him. Lady, I was mistaken; I have suffered bitterly. I have been hungry and cold, I have wanted everything but sorrow, I have done everything but ask alms; and yet through it all my keenest pang, my sharpest pain, has been the longing for my husband's face—for the sound of his voice."

May longed to comfort her.

"You must be reconciled."

The other shook her head.

"I promised him he should be free—I told him I would never trouble him. I might have been a drawback to him then. Think what I should be now—a woman who has toiled for weary months for bread, whose clothes are mean and threadbare, whose child is clad in charity garments!"

"He loved you?" urged May.

"He loved me."

"And love stoned for all."

"I cannot go to him," urged the other. "I and my baby—there is no place for us in the whole world. I was going to end the struggle only I saw you; I heard your words, and I resolved I would save you from suffering as I have done. Promise me my fate shall save you from life misery—promise me you will never leave the shelter of your husband's home!"

May hesitated.

"Promise!" urged that tired, sad voice.

"I promise. I will never, never leave him unless he sends me away."

The other girl rose languidly, as though to continue her weary way, but May would not let her.

"You have saved me from misery," she pleaded. "You have taught me, no matter how I suffer, my place is by my husband. Promise me you will do nothing rash. Let me help you."

"You could not."

"I could. Money is not much, but it will do something, and I have more than I can spend."

A crimson flush dyed her listener's cheek.

"I have changed my last shilling. My landlady turned us into the streets. I have no refuge but the Union, and yet it hurts me to take money."

"Look on me as a friend."

"I have one friend," and she sighed; "but I dare not go to him for my shame."

"Who is he?"

"My father's kinsman. He was good and true, but my husband distrusted him. He is rich and great. They tell me he has a fair wife of his own now. I dare not go to him with my tale of sorrow."

"Let me help you," pleaded May. "If you will not take aid from me, tell me this kinsman's name, and let me write to him?"

"Stuart St. John."

Pale to her very lips grew May.

"It is my husband!"

"Your husband?"

"Yes."

"And you wished to leave him?"

"You don't understand," hoarsely. "He is all that is good and true, but I have deceived him," and Alix smiled with a strange, wistful radiance.

"He will forgive you."

"I mean to ask him;" then, with a strange pain at her heart, "Did you know him very well?"

"I saw him twice. I was the daughter of his late kinsman."

"You are Alix St. John?"

"I was once."

"I have heard all."

"All?"

"Yes, I know that you are Lady Manners." "Aye; this child," bending to him the sleeping face, "is the heir of one of England's noblest names, but—"

"You have suffered much, but you will be happy now. Listen, Alix, I am Stuart's wife, and so must be your cousin. Come home with me?"

Alix looked at her worn black dress.

"Come home with me!" urged May. "I am rich, and all that I have is at your service. You are Stuart's cousin, I can't help loving you. I have wished for a sister, Alix. You and I will be just like sisters, Alix."

She had not forgotten her sorrow, only she could not leave this forlorn creature by herself. Linking her arm within Alix's she drew her down the shady walks until they reached the gate; here Lady St. John hailed a cab, and drove to one of those noted shops in the Westbourne-grove. There were about ten sovereigns in her purse, and these were sufficient to array Lady Manners and the boy in very presentable attire, and also to provide a portmanteau, stocked with the most useful articles of clothing. She had been so busy in her preparations that she had no time to dread her meeting with her husband—not until the cab actually stopped before the bijou villa did that sharp pain return.

She mounted the steps slowly, and St. John stood in the hall awaiting her. Perhaps the servants imagined him equal to the occasion, for, excepting the porter who busied himself paying the cab, they had all disappeared.

"May?"

He took her hand, but she pointed to her guests.

"You will be kind to them, Stuart?"

He took Alix gently by the hand.

"My dear, have you come to claim a kinsman's protection at last? Do you know your husband committed the search for you to my hands when he left England? This will be joyful news for him!"

"Then he cared—he was sorry?"

"It pretty well broke his heart."

A servant came slowly towards them. Lord St. John commanded Lady Manners and the baby to her care, then he linked his arm in his wife's, and drew her into his own particular sanctum. He had noticed she was trembling.

"I have a great deal to tell you, May."

The sweet eyes met his unflinchingly.

"You are going to send me away," she whispered. "Oh, Stuart! you will break my heart!"

"Sweet, what can you mean?"

She gathered courage.

"I have wanted to tell you so often, only I could not. General Anstruther's drawing-room did not witness our first meeting. I am the miserable girl you rescued long ago from Sir Bertram Danvers."

"I knew it."

"You knew it?"

"Do you think I could be mistaken in your face, child? I recognised you at once. May, I mind nothing, so that I have your whole heart."

"You have had it always."

"Do you know that Danvers is free?"

"Don't!" she said, piteously. "Oh, Stuart! he would talk to me last night, and I couldn't make him understand."

She leant against her husband. He drew her a little closer to himself.

"You are not sorry, child? You don't wish last January's ceremony had never been?"

"No. Even this morning, when I thought you would never love me again, I felt a sort of comfort that I belonged to you."

He stroked her hair.

"Why did you think I should never love you again?"

"You had gone to Mackstone!"

"I was sent for. Mrs. Russell was dying."

"My aunt? Oh, Stuart! how did she know I was your wife?"

"She didn't know it."

"Why did she want to see you? What did she say?"

"I was too late, dear. She was dead!"

"Dead!"

"Ay, but she had left a letter explaining all. You remember what I told you of my cousin's death, May?—and how Alix lost her inheritance?"

"The eldest daughter was found."

"A girl was found who professed to be the elder daughter."

"But—"

"Dear, it was a cruel conspiracy. Mrs. Russell passed off her own child as Lord St. John's daughter, while his true heiress was hovering between life and death at General Anstruther's. No wonder, sweet, your heart bent out to poor Alix. You are one bone and one flesh; for you are both Sir John's daughters."

May clung to him with a little cry.

"And you will love me always?"

"I will love you while we live, sweetheart."

And he kept his word. Sir Clarence, apprised of the good news in store for him, hastened to England to be introduced to his son and embrace his wife.

He took them both out to Belgium, where Alix was greatly admired. Their separation had taught them how dear she was to him. The Dowager was at a distance. May and her husband had insisted on presenting Alix with half her father's wealth, so Sir Clarence was not such a poor man after all; and—as such things go—they pass for a very happy couple.

Margaret Russell did not long survive her change of fortune. The moment she read her mother's confession she knew resistance was useless. The smallpox had impaired her constitution, and she died before the first anniversary of May's wedding.

Sir Bertram is travelling in foreign parts. He often meets Sir Clarence and Lady Manners. His manner to Alix is full of quiet, deferential attention. She reminds him constantly of his first love.

And that first love was herself—the May-blossom, or, to speak more plainly, Margaret Lady St. John. Well, she is happy; the storm of life has passed; the clouds have flown; and even if the years should bury a faint return of them her husband's love would gild them with a softer radiance; for Stuart worships his fair young wife just as he did on the fair spring morning when he first discovered she was one of Lord St. John's Daughters.

[THE END.]

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

—:—

CHAPTER VII.

THE FACE OF HER ENEMY.

The next morning Elsie was down in the study at eight o'clock, but it is almost needless to remark that she found herself alone.

Indeed, the mistress of the Grange was never at any time an early riser; getting up in the morning and passing through the hands of her maid being always a long and a serious business, and on the present occasion she was rather later than usual.

Elsie, however, had got along very well without her.

She dared not write letters or copy reports except in the presence of her employer, for she felt sure that if she attempted to do so she would be considered to have taken a great liberty, but she found a volume of Macaulay's essays on one of the library shelves, and this she took into the garden, immediately before the study window, so that Mrs. Maltby could call her when she came down.

Here, making herself comfortable in a low American chair, she opened her book and began to read.

All young people indulge in a certain amount of hero-worship, and Elsie had completely lost

herself in reading the trial of Warren Hastings, when she was startled by the voice of Clarence Maltby saying, in a low angry tone,—

"A nice trick you played me last night, Miss Heath!"

He was standing behind her as he spoke, and she had just presence of mind enough not to rise, nor to close her book, but to go on reading as though she had not heard him.

That she was not unconscious of his presence he knew by the involuntary start she had given, but her silence had its effect upon him, and his tone was by no means so familiar as he planted himself before and said,—

"Good morning, Miss Heath!"

"Good morning, Mr. Maltby," she replied, coldly, half rising to bow, then resuming her seat and her book, without really looking at him.

"Your book seems to be very interesting," he remarked, irritated by her indifference to his presence.

"Yes, it is," she replied, calmly.

And she went on reading as though he had not been standing within a couple of yards of her.

"Upon my word, you are not a very entertaining companion!" he exclaimed, in a tone of annoyance; "can't you close that confounded book and talk to a fellow?"

She did not close her book, but she let it rest upon her lap, while she leaned back in her chair, and, looking up, met his pale, blue, hungry eyes, which seemed as though they would devour her.

He was not a fascinating-looking object, with his red hair, his coarse, flushed features, and his thick neck, and she found it by no means difficult to say calmly and steadily,—

"I have no desire to be entertaining, Mr. Maltby; I wish to read my book until your mother requires me."

He was so taken aback by her coolness, and by her complete indifference to himself, that for the instant he gasped like a fish; then, muttering something which, if spoken aloud, would have been quite unfit for a lady's ears, he turned sharply on his heel and walked away.

Elsie resumed her book, unconscious that this little scene had been witnessed by Mrs. Maltby from her dressing-room window.

That lady would willingly have given the diamond ring she held in her hand at the moment to have heard the few words that passed between the young couple, but this was impossible.

What she saw, however, went some little way towards convincing her that Elsie was not likely to fall a victim to her good-for-nothing son, but she was by no means satisfied that the girl did not intend to marry him.

Like many mothers who have but one son, she thought that every girl to whom he paid the least attention must be quite ready to become his wife, and she either could not, or would not, believe that his admiration could be really unwelcome to any girl.

Poor friendless Elsie continued to look at her book as though she were reading it, but the words swam before her eyes.

She felt very indignant and very much excited, though she was far too proud to let Clarence Maltby or his mother see how much she was annoyed.

In one sense, Elsie was very inexperienced in the ways of the world.

It is true that she was naturally dignified and a trifle shy, but though she had had no home of her own, in which brothers and cousins and friends could tell her how pretty she was, she had not escaped admiration.

Both of the schools in which she had spent her young life had been conducted by maiden ladies of a very uncertain age, who had regarded man in the aggregate as a very dangerous animal, going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour.

The consequence of this training upon Elsie was to make her regard the opposite sex with extreme distrust, and to be upon her guard when any attention that was

more than an ordinary civility was paid to her.

Isolt Greatrex's advice concerning Mr. Clarence Maltby had not been thrown away upon Elsie, while the young man's appearance certainly did not prepossess her in his favour, and she was quite resolved to let him clearly understand, not only that she was not a girl with whom he could make secret assignations, but that she resented the liberty he had taken in attempting to do so.

To look a man steadily in the face and tell him coolly that you do not wish to interest him, requires some nerve, however, and Elsie had scarcely regained her usual composure when the gong sounded for breakfast, and she had to close her book and re-enter the house.

She returned through the library window, which she had left open, intending to replace the book on the shelf from whence she had taken it, when Mrs. Maltby, wearing a long trailing skirt, came slowly through the opposite doorway towards her.

"Good morning, Miss Heath," said the mistress of the house, and to Elsie's surprise she presented her cheek to be kissed.

The girl obediently gave the expected salute, while Mrs. Maltby played with her large diamond ring, and rolled her big black eyes as though she were blind and had no control over the eyeballs.

From this habit of hers she seemed to see nothing, but there were few things that escaped her observation, and now she noticed that Elsie's cheek was flushed, while there was still a lingering expression of annoyance in the beautiful deep blue eyes, which, with their black brows and eyelashes, were in such strange contrast to her bright golden hair.

She had not watched from her window in vain, and she guessed the cause of this suppressed anger, but she took no notice of it beyond asking carelessly,—

"Have you been down long, dear?"

"Since eight o'clock," was the answer. "I thought you wanted me at that time."

"Yes, I meant to have got up early, but I have had a bad night. I usually have bad nights," continued Mrs. Maltby, with a yawn. "So you'd better not get up early another morning unless I send for you."

"Thank you," replied Elsie.

Then she replaced her book on the shelf, and stood waiting for Mrs. Maltby to lead the way to the breakfast-room.

But the mistress of the Grange never did things like other people, and though there was perfect freedom in her house, when the house was full of visitors, she and her secretary, or the particular guest she managed to victimise to do her writing, had always to be fetched from the study and brought to table, or they would never have got there.

Probably it was this custom of having to look up his mother that made young Maltby now put his head in at the doorway and ask,—

"Are you coming to breakfast this morning, mother? The gong sounded ten minutes ago."

"Yes, I am coming at once," was the answer.

But the young man did not wait; he marched off sullenly, and was seated at the table and the butler was waiting upon him before the two ladies in single file appeared.

Fortunately for Elsie the servants looked after her wants, otherwise she would have come badly off on the present occasion, for Mr. Clarence Maltby took no notice of her presence, and his mother relapsed into such a state of abstraction that she forgot to eat her cutlet or drink her coffee until both were cold, when the butler, who knew her ways, quietly replaced them with something more palatable.

When Clarence had finished his breakfast he rose from his seat, shook himself like a discontented dog, and remarked gloomily,—

"I shan't be home to dinner. I was never in such a dead-alive hole in my life. One would think there was a death in the house, or that you two had taken a vow of silence."

"My dear boy, if you want to talk do so, by

"all means," observed his mother, placidly: "and, Miss Heath, why don't you talk?"

"I have nothing to say," replied Elsie, with a little laugh, "and I am not equal to making an original remark on the spur of the moment."

She did not look at the young man as she spoke; she had determined never to voluntarily address herself to him, though in the presence of a third person she would have answered any question, or even have conversed with him on ordinary topics.

But this did not suit Clarence Maltby. He had been accustomed to have his own way too constantly to patiently endure a check, and now he went off grunting loudly, as though the dulness of the breakfast-table were due to anyone but himself.

As soon as Clarence was gone, Mrs. Maltby seemed to wake up.

She dismissed the servants from the room, ate a good breakfast, and began to talk confidentially about her son.

Much as Elsie disliked the topic she was obliged to sit still and tolerate, saying "yes" or "no," or "indeed," when her companion paused for some such sympathetic observation.

At length she seemed weary of her object, probably because she did not find out what she was anxious to discover, and, therefore, and taking Elsie's arm, she said,—

"Let us stroll about the garden, my dear. I don't feel equal to much work this morning, though I have a great deal to do; but we shall have no time together when Charlie Birch comes."

"Shan't we?" asked Elsie, to whom the prospect of spending much time with Mrs. Maltby as her sole companion was not alluring.

"No, she took a fancy to you, and I dare say you will amuse her, but I think I must ask two or three other people to come and stay with us, though I don't know if two or three good parties while she is here would not be better. What do you think, Miss Heath? Which would you prefer?"

"I have no preference," replied Elsie, with a smile; "it really can make no difference to me. It is a matter simply for your own consideration."

"If I only considered myself I shouldn't invite anybody," replied the mistress of the Grange, impatiently, "but I must have Clarence married; he gets into all kinds of mischief, and he must have a wife to take care of him. Charlie Birch is an heiress, and of course he can't marry without money."

Elsie made no reply, for in her heart she no more believed that Miss Birch would marry the young man than that she would do so herself.

The infatuated mother's next remark startled her, for Mrs. Maltby in a slow drawling tone observed,—

"I wish you were rich, my dear!"

"Eh!" exclaimed the girl, in surprise.

"Yes, there is no one I should like better for a daughter-in-law than you if you were well off, or if Clarence could afford to marry a penniless girl."

She looked up suddenly as she spoke, with those big rolling eyes of hers; she had said this to trap Elsie, and she was therefore rather disconcerted by the girl's clear, merry laugh which rang out before she said,—

"It is well that I am poor, or I should sadly disappoint you. I shall certainly not marry for many years; probably I shall never marry at all."

"Then you would not accept Clarence if he proposed to you?" asked Mrs. Maltby, so far astonished as to ask bluntly the question that rose uppermost in her mind.

"Mr. Maltby has not proposed to me, and he never will do so," replied Elsie coldly, and with unconscious dignity, "and I don't think it fair to him or to myself to discuss the subject."

"Perhaps it isn't," returned the mistress of the house, slightly, "though most girls

would be flattered by the suggestion; but we have wasted time enough in talking idle nonsense."

So saying she led the way to the study.

It did not suit her purpose to quarrel with Elsie just at present, but she felt a grudge against her for the way in which she had received the suggestion about Clarence; and though she ought to have been satisfied that there was no danger to her son in the girl's presence here, she felt foolishly annoyed to find that Elsie considered herself unsafe.

For the rest of the morning she dictated letters, one of which was to be translated into French, and she turned over and over and pretended to read a letter in cipher, which she told the girl was from one of the greatest revolutionists in Europe.

"You must never attempt to translate this cipher," she said, looking at Elsie steadily, "for if you succeed you will be compelled to join the brotherhood, or your life would not be worth a day's purchase."

"I never shall attempt it," was the answer, "I don't understand such matters, and I have no sympathy with revolutionists. They seem to be indifferent to the sufferings of others so long as they can gain their own ends, and they care nothing for the destruction they bring upon innocent people provided they themselves go scot-free."

"Your remark shows how very little you know about the matter, my dear," returned Mrs. Maltby, severely; "there, copy that letter, will you!"

So saying, she handed the girl a badly-written scrawl, the copying of which lasted for the next half-hour, and during this time Mrs. Maltby came to the conclusion that she did not like her young secretary.

She had done all in her power to impress Elsie with her wealth and with her importance in certain shady political circles, but though the wealth was real enough, the influence was nil, and the girl soon understood that this rich, foolish woman was but a tool in the hands of others.

Again the day was becoming very long and wearisome. The atmosphere of the study became stifling, and Elsie's head was beginning to ache, when the door was thrown open, and a servant announced,

"Miss Birch."

"My dear, how very glad I am to see you!" said Mrs. Maltby, casting a rueful look at the pile of letters she had still to answer.

"I am glad to hear it," was the reply; "because Sis said you wouldn't be."

"Your sister ought to know that I am always glad to see you, my dear," was the not altogether truthful response.

"That is kind of you. I am going to ask you to give me some luncheon and to drive in to town with me—you and Miss Heath. I want to do some shopping, and I have tickets for a flower show, which I am sure you would both of you enjoy. Sis can't go with me, and I felt certain that I might count upon you."

"Certainly, my dear! I will go with pleasure, but Clarence is not at home, and won't be back for the day."

"Oh! I don't want Clarence, we can do very well without a gentleman. If you and Miss Heath come I shall be all right."

"But I want Miss Heath to answer a pile of letters," objected Mrs. Maltby, who did not care to take Elsie with her.

"Oh, bother the letters!" was the wilful exclamation. "I particularly want Miss Heath to come. Indeed, I shan't go without her—there! But I am famished, and so ought you to be. It is past two o'clock, and I am dying for my lunch."

"Then we will have it at once. We had better leave these things as they are," she added, turning to Elsie, who was feeling inexpressibly grateful to Charlie for her determination to take her with them.

So they went into the dining-room, where luncheon had been waiting for some time, and when they were seated at table, and had been

helped by the attentive servant, Clotilde remarked,—

"It will be two or three weeks before I shall be able to come and stay with you, Mrs. Maltby, for my sister won't hear of my leaving her until after a round of entertainments which she is going to give; but you and Clarence and Miss Heath must take part in them, and when they are over I'll come and stir you up. Always keep people alive," she added, turning to Elsie with a winning smile.

"So I should think," was the response; "you have not many things to trouble you."

"Well, I don't know," returned Charlie, a trifle more gravely. "I am not exempt from many of the ills that flesh is heir to, but I try to look upon the brightest side of life, and it is surprising what a difference that makes!"

"But suppose there was no bright side to look at?" asked Elsie, sadly.

She was contrasting down-town military existence with the life of this bright-faced, sunny-tempered girl, upon whom both fortune and beauty had been lavishly bestowed, and she could not repress a sigh as she thought how very different was her own lot.

"My dear, there is always a bright side to everybody's life," said the heiress, emphatically. "You don't always see it, but it is there all the same, and the more you look for it the more brightness you'll find. Of course life is gloomy sometimes. Don't you know the proverb, 'that the blackest cloud has a silver lining'?"

Elsie tried to smile, but the smile was a sad one; and Miss Birch, seeing that the girl had something heavy on her mind, turned the conversation by saying,—

"Now we are not going to waste all the afternoon in talking; I must go to the shop Regent-street before I go to the flower show; so please get dressed as quickly as possible."

A little more than an hour afterwards Elsie was sitting in an open carriage, drawn up before a fashionable shop in Regent-street, Charlie and Mrs. Maltby having left her there.

She had no fear of being recognized, for the one man in the world from whom she was hiding had not seen her since she was a little child, and would be pretty certain not to recognize her, even if he came this way.

But she was, nevertheless, scared when a young man leaned against the carriage-door and spoke to her, though a glance showed her that it was Clarence Maltby.

In strolling along the pavement with another man of his own type, he had been struck by Elsie's beauty before he actually recognised her face, and, angry as he had felt with her in the morning, he could not withstand the temptation of stopping to speak, and to ask what she was doing here.

She told him, and he said; with an affectionation of delight that he was far from feeling,—

"Charlie Birch with you? She won't think it too much trouble to entertain me. I'll take the fourth seat. See you another day, old man!" with a nod to his friend, who had lingered by his side hoping for an introduction to the beautiful girl with whom Maltby seemed to be upon such friendly terms.

At this moment, however, the two ladies came out of the shop, and they and Clarence got into the carriage and were driven away.

But as the carriage began to move, Elsie's eyes were fascinated for a moment by those of a woman who, standing on the pavement, was looking at her steadily.

Another second, and the spirited horses had dashed on, but in that brief glance the friendless girl had recognised her implacable enemy, Edith Grey.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY KINGWOOD MAKES A DISCOVERY.

No one could be dull with Charlie Birch as a companion; for, besides being witty and full of joyous life herself, she had that rare faculty

of being able to draw out the most amiable qualities of those with whom she happened to come in contact.

Elifie felt this influence distinctly. She was greatly attracted towards the bright, generous-hearted girl, who ignored her dependent position, and who seemed to seek her as a friend, and she responded so cordially that Clarence on one occasion jealousy remarked,—

" Fifty one of you can't change your sex, because there'd be some sense in your being so fond of each other—as it is, it's booh. I'd be sorry to see myself running after any other man, if he was ever such a jolly fellow."

" And I should be sorry for the other man if you did," retorted Charlie, slyly. " Happily, girls are not like men; we have a hundred things to do and to talk about that creatures like you don't understand."

This was true enough.

They were fond of reading, which Clarence Maltby was not. Then they were both of them clever with their needle. They could embroider in silks and wools, they could paint, and both were good pianists, while Elifie, at any rate, could sing well.

Nature had given her a good voice, and young as she was, it had been carefully trained, so that she was a decided acquisition to any social gathering where music was an important feature in the entertainment.

Mrs. Maltby soon realised this, and she felt that it would be impossible to keep her secretary as much in the background as she had meant to do, but she likewise made up her mind that, although she could not be ignorant when there was company at the Grange, she would not take her to the Burstones, or to any other place to which she might be invited.

The consequence was, that on the occasion of a garden-party of which Charlie had spoken, and to which Elifie was specially bidden, Mrs. Maltby appeared at it alone. Her son had declined to wait for her, and had gone on before; and just as Elifie was about to go to her room to dress, her employer had coolly remarked that she wanted a report of a committee meeting copied, and Miss Heath must stay at home to do it.

Poor Elifie's face flushed and her eyes filled with tears, for she was young; her life at the Grange was not too smooth nor too pleasant for her, and she had looked forward to this party with more anticipation of enjoyment than she could under the circumstances have thought possible.

But there was no help for it; she was living here to copy reports, write letters, or do anything of the kind that might be required of her, and not to go to garden-parties, as though she belonged to wealthy people, as she once believed, and had not to earn her own living.

She tried honestly to work after Mrs. Maltby had left her, and not to care for the gay party, but the consciousness that the report she was copying was not needed, that it would make no earthly difference to any human being but herself whether it was copied now or six months' hence, helped to add to her discontent, while tears of vexation suffused her eyes when she remembered that Miss Birch would be very nearly as disappointed as herself.

Despite her grief, however, she wrote rapidly. The report was not a long one, and her facile pen ran swiftly over the paper.

She was beginning to detect this study as much as any of her predecessors had done, and to associate with the small room many of the petty mortifications which were daily meted out to her; so she was eager to get her work finished, that she might take a book and go out into the garden, where, under the shade of some tree, she could forget her transient trouble.

Just as she had fastened the sheets of paper together, and was stretching her arms above her head with sheer weariness, there was a loud knock and ring at the front door which was on the opposite side of the hall, and a few seconds afterwards Charlie Birch came into the study, followed by a tall young man, whom Elifie never remembered to have seen before.

" My dear, miserable Cinderella, I'm your fairy godmother, and I'm come to take you to the ball!" exclaimed Charlie; " so put on your fine clothes as fast as you can."

" But what will Mrs. Maltby say?" asked Elifie, nervously; " she evidently doesn't wish me to go."

" Who cares what she says!" retorted Charlie, indignantly. " She ought to have been ashamed of herself to leave you behind."

" Unhappily I am obliged to care," sighed Elifie. " But I should like to go if you think she won't be angry. I have just finished the copying she left me to do."

" Then there is no longer any excuse for hesitation," observed Charlie, with decision; " besides, I told Mrs. Maltby I was coming for you, and she knows that I always have my own way. Most of my friends know that, don't they, Mr. Kingswood?"

Elifie looked at the young man whose name she now heard for the first time, and she bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction which followed; then she and Charlie went up to her room, leaving Harry Kingswood to wait for them.

" What a lucky fellow I am!" muttered the young man, as he threw himself into Mrs. Maltby's comfortable chair, stretched his long legs, and proceeded to take stock of his surroundings.

" To think," he went on, carelessly, " that I should follow that cat, Miss Grey, this morning, and that the chase should lead to nothing, but just as I am thinking of going back to town I should run against Burlstone, who tells me that Charlie is staying with his wife, and who will take me home to luncheon, whether I like it or not, and there I am kept for this garden-party, and am brought here for Charlie's last new friend, who turns out to be the very girl I was seeking."

He became silent after this.

Conscience whispered that he ought to let Denison know of his discovery, for he had recognised Elifie, though she, having only eyes for her guardian on that miserable day when she left the Hermitage, had never so much as looked at the face of her guardian's friend.

But Harry Kingswood was deplorably weak where a pretty woman was concerned; and though he admired Charlie Birch, and thought it possible that he might one day marry her, he could not resist the temptation that Elifie's rare loveliness had for him.

He was still thinking of this when the two girls returned.

Elifie's appearance had changed considerably, but he almost thought he preferred her in the soft, clinging dress of peacock blue in which she had been sitting writing, to the cream-tinted costume, with its frills of lace, and the suspicion of gold threads which ran through it.

Charlie, at any rate, thought Elifie's dress perfect, and the two girls were in high spirits when they entered the carriage that was waiting for them.

" We will go through the park," observed Charlie, giving the order to the coachman, " it will save a good mile, and we don't want to lose any time."

So they went by this, the nearest way, and thus missed meeting Mr. Clarence Maltby, who, finding the garden-party slow, and seeing by his mother coming alone that Elifie was left behind, thought this a good opportunity for amusing himself at the expense of the "pretty little sprite."

When, on reaching the Grange, he discovered his mistake, he was too bad-tempered to return to the Burstones, but went off to London, from whence he did not return until the small hours of the morning.

Elifie's good spirits returned when she found herself well dressed and riding through the fresh air with Charlie Birch by her side, and with a very good-looking young man seated opposite to her.

Not that his good looks mattered to her, but it is pleasant to have handsome faces about

one, and no one felt this more keenly than our poor little heroine.

Mrs. Maltby certainly was not handsome, and Clarence was, to Elifie's mind, positively ugly; and having been shut up in the same house a good deal with them of late, it was positively a treat for her to feast her eyes upon Charlie Birch and to look upon Harry Kingswood, whose fine face and long limbs were certainly worthy of admiration.

Indeed, so bright and cheerful had she become that it was not until she came face to face with Mrs. Maltby that it suddenly occurred to her that she might, after all, have done wrong in coming.

But Mrs. Maltby, with that far-away look in her eyes, seemed to have forgotten that she did not bring Elifie with her, and taking the girl's arm, she said,

" The sun is very hot; let us find a seat under the shelter of a tree. I do think garden-parties are intolerably stupid."

Elifie submitted to be thus taken away into a corner.

She expected to be lectured about her conduct in coming here, perhaps to be dismissed, or to be informed that she would be so, but Mrs. Maltby never did what other people expected she would do, and she talked pleasantly about the people present, told the girl the names of two or three persons who approached them, and then, all at once, she asked, suddenly,

" Have you seen Clarence? he was here."

Elifie answered in the negative.

She saw Mrs. Burlstone with Mr. Kingswood approaching, and she hoped that they were going to take Mrs. Maltby away from her side; but in this she was mistaken, for her hostess, as she came near to them, said,—

" We want you to sing, Miss Heath. My sister says that you brought two or three songs with you!"

" I am afraid it would be more correct to say that she brought them," replied Elifie, with a smile. " I am likewise afraid that I am not in very good voice to-day, but I will do my best."

" You can't do more than that," was the gracious answer. " Mr. Kingswood, will you take care of Mrs. Maltby? You will be able to hear the music out here, I don't doubt."

Mr. Kingswood, who had not previously known the mistress of Maltby Grange, bowed, then dropped into the seat that Elifie had vacated.

He was curious to know the woman who had left the pretty girl at home to copy out reports while she went to the garden-party to which they were both invited. Beyond this, also, he was desirous of making some inquiries about Elifie.

I have said that he recognised her, and so he believed he had, but on second thoughts he was not quite as certain on the point as he would have liked to have been.

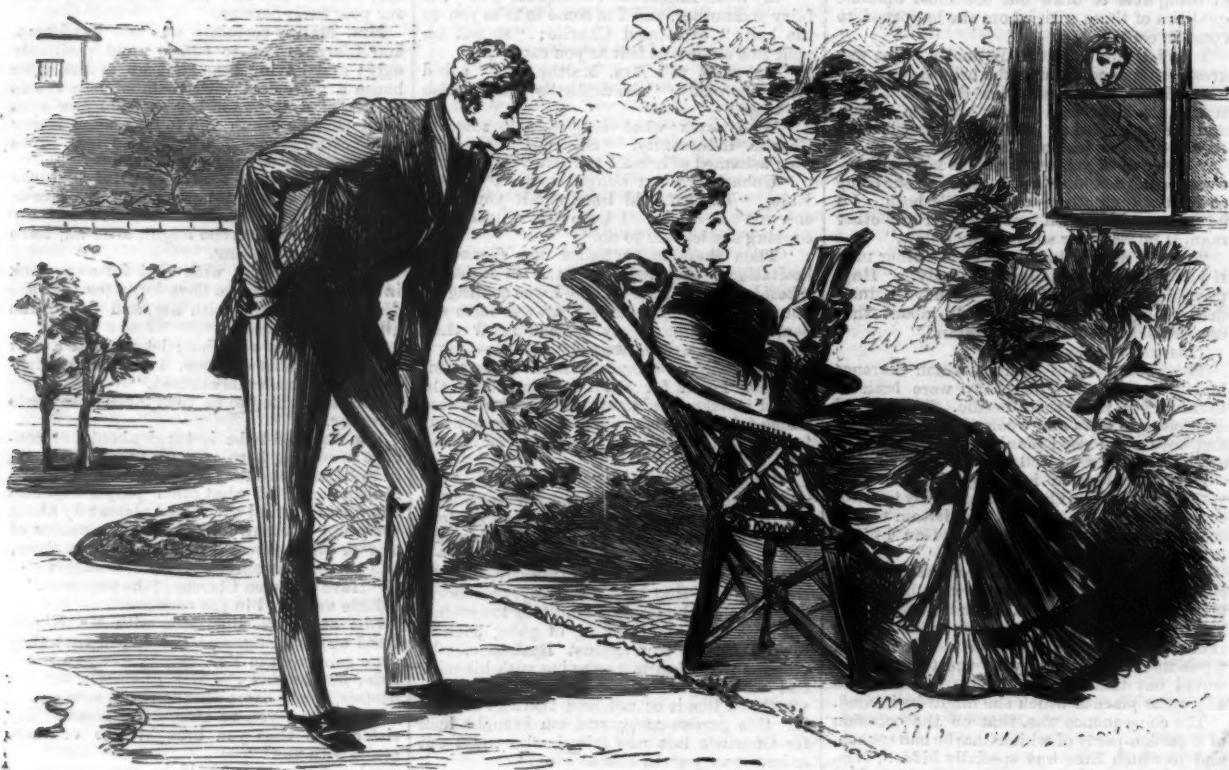
It was, he told himself, the face he had seen at the railway-station as he and Denison left it, and he believed it was the same as that represented in the carte-de-visite of the lost girl which his friend had showed him.

But he had not that carte-de-visite here to compare it with what he believed to be the original of the picture; while, on thinking the matter over, it seemed incredible that a friendless girl should be able to leave her only home and find herself a short time afterwards residing in a house like Maltby Grange, even though her position was a dependent one, and be received by the proud Burstones as a welcome guest; so he began to talk to Mrs. Maltby first of all on general subjects.

Then he told her how he had been to her house that afternoon, and he expressed his wonder at finding her study-table covered with what showed signs of so much earnest work.

This to some people might have seemed impertinent, but he knew that Mrs. Maltby's vanity would keep her from thinking anything of the kind.

He was right, she rose to the bait at once; she talked of her work, her schools, her



["A NICE TRICK YOU PLAYED ME LAST NIGHT, MISS HEATH!" CLARENCE SAID, IN A LOW, ANGRY VOICE.]

missions to the heathen, of her political aspirations, and she hinted at plots and conspiracies to upset existing dynasties, in a random fashion that was decidedly bewildering to her listener.

Still he did not get her round to talk about her secretary, though he made two or three well-directed efforts in that direction.

Mrs. Maltby, once mounted on one of her hobby-horses, would have talked on till her carriage came for her, but Harry Kingswood had no intention of spending his time in this fashion, and he remarked as soon as he had the opportunity,—

"Miss Heath was working very hard when we disturbed her. I suppose she helps you a great deal?"

"No one can really help me!" was the lofty reply. "She writes letters from dictation, and copies various things for me; but that is a thing that anybody can do. The brainwork is mine, and I can trust no one else to do my work for me."

"That, of course," he assented, quietly; "still, it must be a relief to have somebody else to do the drudgery. You always keep a secretary, I suppose?"

"Yes; but they are an awful nuisance," replied the lady, with a yawn. "It is wonderful what fools girls can make of themselves!"

"Is it?" he asked, as though the subject were one to which he had not given much thought.

Mrs. Maltby looked at him in mild surprise, but the strains of a sweet girlish voice were coming through the open windows of the drawing-room, and Mr. Kingswood had awed at random in listening to the song.

"You admire Miss Heath?" she asked, suddenly turning her big rolling eyes upon him, as though she would look into his very heart.

"I!" he exclaimed, confused by her directness. "I—I don't know; I suppose I do.

She is very pretty; but I have been wondering if I have ever seen her before."

"And you don't know?" was her next suspicious question.

"No, I am not sure. Has she been with you long?"

"Only a few weeks," was the vague reply.

"Ah, then I must have been mistaken," he answered, carelessly; though to himself he said, "I was right; it is she; but I'll make quite sure before the evening is over."

The garden-party was voted a success by the majority of the guests, but by seven o'clock all had departed, save a favoured few, who had been invited to stay to dinner.

Mrs. Maltby, Elsie, and Mr. Kingswood were among this number, and very pleasant they found it, for Charlie Birch liked an informal party, and she took good care to make her sister only invite those people to remain who were likely to be agreeable.

If Elsie had not been there Mrs. Maltby would certainly not have been asked to stay; but of course she did not know this, and, as she was seated next to Harry at the dinner-table, she talked to him incessantly, until he ventured to remind her that she was positively eating no dinner.

Still, she continued to talk, and he, having a purpose to gain, listened, and replied to her remarks as sensibly as he could without committing himself to any definite opinion.

It was dull, miserable work listening to this by no means clever woman, particularly as he could see that Charlie Birch was talking very affably with a young curate who sat next to her, and that Elsie was listening very intently to a soldierly-looking man, who was telling her about Egypt, from whence he had just returned.

But Harry Kingswood's patience and amiability had its reward, and before the party broke up that evening Mrs. Maltby invited him to come and spend a few days at Maltby Grange.

"Miss Birch and several other friends are coming to us very shortly," she remarked in her vague way, "some people that I should like you to meet, who would convince you more clearly than I have been able to do that Russia is a seething volcano, and that a revolution may occur there any day."

"It is possible that you are right," he replied, politely. "I don't know much about Russia, but I shall like to come and see you, and meet your friends. When do you say you expect them?"

"I am not quite certain," was the answer. "It will be next week or the week after; but give me your address, and I will write."

He took out his card-case to obey her, and remarked, casually,

"A letter sent to my club will find me sooner or later; but I am staying with a friend at Addington, and I will give you his address."

"Addington," repeated Charlie, who, with Elsie, was standing by; "that's near the Shirley Hills, isn't it?"

"Yes, very near," he replied, observing, without seeming to look at her, that Elsie's face became troubled. "Do you know the neighbourhood?"

"No, I have only been there once or twice; but I remember the heather on the hills—it was simply lovely. I wonder if we couldn't have a picnic there this autumn, Sis?"

She turned to Mrs. Burlstone as she spoke, and, therefore, she did not notice how pale Elsie had become, though she did hear Kingswood say,—

"That is the name of the man with whom I am staying. Can you read it, Miss Heath? 'Lionel Denison, Esq., The Hermitage, Addington, Surrey.'"

"Yes," replied Elsie, but so faintly that Charlie turned round sharply to see what ailed her.

(To be continued.)



["DO YOU WANT ME TO PLAY THE HUMBUG?" HIRST BROKE IN, FIERCELY.]

OVELLETTE.]

SWEET MARGARET.

—

CHAPTER I.

"How pretty your dress is, Bertie! Was it designed to kill?"

Miss Vandeleur lifted a pair of velvety brown eyes to the questioner and smiled, showing all her pretty white teeth.

"Of course I want to do some execution, Hirst; but I always choose my dresses with a view to please myself, and at the same time enhance my few charms. I am quite of your opinion—the dress is very pretty."

She stood a little distance from him, as it were posing for his admiration, and she seemed fairer than ever he had thought her, in her dress of frosted-white tulle and shimmering silk, unrelieved by any colour save a cluster of scarlet holly-berries and green leaves at her bosom.

He leaned a little towards her.

"You're a perfect Christmas fairy!" he said, and she blushed slightly under his inspection. The strains of "Dream Faces" came to them where they stood in the shadow of ferns and exotics, and the girl's tiny white-slipped feet kept time to the beautiful air.

"You are anxious to rejoin the dancers?" her companion questioned. "Shall we go now?"

"Not unless you wish it, Hirst," consulting her tablets. "This is your waltz, I see."

"Then I elect to remain here"—his grey eyes taking in every detail of her girlish freshness and prettiness; "it is cooler here, and one has a chance of talking to you. But let me take you to a seat. There is a jolly one at the far end of the place."

So saying he led her to a retired spot, and sat down by her in silence, as if waiting for her to speak.

Her bright prettiness charmed him as it had

never before done. He knew it was the dear desire of his mother's heart to see Bertie Vandeleur his wife, not only because she was her father's heiress and the estates dovetailed, but because she was really attached to the girl; and he began to feel his happiness might lie in gratifying his mother's wish.

He had known Bertie as a child. Her family was good, and she would be a wealthy woman at her father's death, for Mr. Vandeleur had estates in Jamaica too. Even at this time he was absent directing some improvements there, so Mrs. Vandeleur and her daughter were spending their Christmas at the "Hall."

His thoughts held him silent so long that the girl asked,—

"What are you thinking? Oh, it was some treason—you look so very guilty," she laughed, softly, and glanced at him through her long dark lashes.

"One thought" was Aunt Priscilla will have a miserable journey. Five miles is a long drive, and I fancy she is very late. Her train was due an hour ago."

"Oh," Miss Vandeleur remarked, carelessly, "trains are always late on Christmas Eve. Miss Lomax should have timed her return earlier. For my part, I shall be quite content if she does not arrive until the midnight of Boxing Day."

Her words released him from the spell she had cast upon him.

"I wish, Bertie, you had a little more affection for poor old Prissy. She is the most honest, good-hearted of women."

"Just so," coolly; "especially where she has a prejudice. She is particularly honest, and, just then, witness the victim of her hate," laughingly stretching out her gloved hands. "I believe she credits me with all manner of wickedness, and then you expect me to esteem and—and love her. Thanks, I can't fancy myself going into raptures over an iceberg."

He hardly noticed her latter words.

"I am getting anxious about her," he said, and Bertie laughed again.

"You are a model, nephew Hirst—a shining example to the present irreverent youngsters! Is every Lomax so immaculate?"

He looked at her quickly, but could discover no sneer upon her lips, and her voice had carried no hint of disdain in it. He saw only a coquettish face lit up by large dark eyes.

"She is very pretty," he thought. "Do I love her?"

Miss Vandeleur started.

"I heard the sound of wheels. I guess the estimable old lady has arrived at last. Pray, go down to meet her; tell her my rapture at the thought of seeing her again holds me a prisoner here," and, with her scoffing words following him, he ran down.

A carriage was at the door, and a lady thrust her head from the window; but Hirst Lomax could not see for the blinding snow, and only his aunt's voice led him to her.

"Are you all asleep or dead?" she demanded, irritably. "Don't you know Priscilla Lomax, that none of you come to meet and welcome her? Hirst, are you there?"

The young man stepped out.

"I am here, aunt. You are very late."

"Late! Of course I am! I'll sue the company, upon my honour, as a Lomax! Come here, boy! Are you afraid of the weather? A precious trouble I am in! I've brought you a strange visitor."

He had moved forward, and he saw a figure huddled up in a corner, seemingly inert.

"Who is it, aunt?"

"Who is it?" she mimicked. "Don't stand asking me questions, but give me some help! The poor thing is more dead than alive! Dear! dear! she has fainted again! Lift her out, Hirst, and take her to my room, where those giddy girls daren't come. Be sharp, boy!" impatiently.

Two seconds later Hirst Lomax was carry-

ing a slim figure into the hall, whilst the footmen looked on astonished.

Half way up the stairs he met Bertie, who had the run of the house.

"Who is she?" the young lady questioned, with a critical glance. "Some *protege* of the good Miss Priscilla? Can I be of any help?"

And Miss Lomax, from the rear, said, tartly—

"No; go back to your partner. We shall manage better without than with you!"

"Thanks, madam! with the demurest of curtsies. "Vagrants are not much in my line!"

And she rustled away to the ballroom. Hirst laid his unconscious burden upon a couch; then stood looking helplessly on. Miss Priscilla clasped her bell, and her maid appeared.

She was too good a servant to show any surprise, but began to apply restoratives in a most methodical way; Miss Priscilla helping heartily.

After a long period of unconsciousness the stranger's heavy white lids slowly lifted, and from beneath the dark fringes looked a pair of eyes as indigo violet.

"Oh!" It was a long-drawn, shuddering sigh; then the girl sat up and looked round.

"You are very kindly" she said, and sank again into semi-unconsciousness.

"You're not wanted!" the maiden lady said sharply to her nephew. "Go back to your dancing!"

And Miss Lomax reluctantly obeyed her, haunted on the way by the stranger's eyes of blue, and her most exquisite face, shadowed in the masses of black hair.

Reaching the ballroom he found Miss Vandeleur just released by her partner, and consulting his programme found he was to dance the next with her.

He gained her side, and she gave a swift glance into his dark, good-looking face.

"You are not disposed to dance," she said. "Sit here and talk to me."

That was the last thing he wished, but her imperious manner commanded obedience; so he sat down beside her.

With a smile as cold as it was careless she asked,—

"And who is the fair vagrant?"

"Her name is unknown to me at present," frigidly; "but she is a lady in appearance, and I believe by birth."

"Indeed! Ladies are not usually found roaming country roads in the dead of a snowy night," smiling still; "but I accept your belief as truth. She was fortunate to meet with a good Samaritan, although I must confess Miss Priscilla never struck me in that light before."

"Perhaps not; you have not attempted to learn her intrinsic worth. If a rough diamond she is a very real one."

A shadow flitted over Miss Vandeleur's face; but she remarked, evenly,—

"I am sorry to learn I have done her an injustice. Is it too late to retrieve my fault?"

And those soft brown eyes were lifted once more to his; but now their momentary power was gone.

"Tell me," leaning forward, "is the stranger pretty? My cursory glance failed to satisfy me on that point."

"She is very lovely, or will be when the marks of fatigue have left her," gravely; "and her eyes are blue as—as violets; her hair black as night."

"That is an Irish mixture. Ah! here is Captain Grey coming to claim me. Adieu, mon ami."

Directly afterwards he saw her in the captain's arms, dancing as if the waltz were the only thing worth living for—dancing with a graceful abandon peculiar to herself.

Many eyes followed her as she moved through the maze of men and girls, never looking flushed or excited—only enjoying the moment in a calm manner natural to her.

More than one man present called her pretty; said to himself she was desirable as a wife; but Hirst Lomax turned from her almost in disgust.

"She is a heartless coquette, and it is well my eyes have been opened in time."

The heartless coquette was meanwhile giving a graphic account of the fair stranger. Captain Grey had seen the axwell, and now declared his belief that Hirst was "smitten" with her.

"No doubt her *charmeante* entrance has something to do with it."

"Possibly," said Miss Vandeleur; "but he tells me she is distinctly lovely, with blue eyes and black hair—a lady not only in appearance, but by birth."

"Has she already told him that?" laughing merrily.

"Oh, no; that is a happy inspiration he has had. Gracious a woman is pretty and slender, with white hands and pathetic eyes, a man usually dubs her a lady, and it is not until she speaks that he is aware of his blunder."

"There are exceptions to the rule. Miss Vandeleur," with an ardent glance. "I hope you credit me with superior discernment," and almost insanely he held her closer.

She blushed slightly; but answered, with a laugh.—

"I have a very poor opinion of your sex in general. I'm afraid I can't make an exception of you; believe me, it would be very bad for you. I think I am tired; let us rest a little while."

Quite willing to draw her away from the giddy throng, he found a seat in an alcove, upon which Miss Vandeleur sank, whilst the Captain stood beside her. He bent over her.

"Tell me why you esteem my unfortunate sex so lightly?"

"I have so many reasons for doing so that it would take hours to enumerate them, and to support each reason I could bring forward a dozen arguments—all purely logical."

"I have not the slightest doubt as to your ability to accomplish anything, and I fully believe you are as marvellous as you are—forgive me—beautiful," with a sudden lowering of his voice.

Bertie lifted arch eyes to him.

"Tell me why so many men flatter me, and devote themselves to me? Now, remember you are on your honour, and must speak nothing but truth."

"You are easily answered, Miss Vandeleur. He who is insensible to your charms is unfit for any society but his own."

The girl smiled brightly.

"That is just the sort of answer I expected. But do you think, Captain Grey, all this admiration is disinterested? Has my fortune nothing to do with it?"

He winced slightly, and the smiling brown eyes that seemed not to see the momentary embarrassment were keenly alive to it.

"Some few may be base enough to consider that; but there are others who would be glad to know you had fallen into sudden poverty that so they might prove their loyalty."

He spoke impressively; but Miss Vandeleur was in no way touched or confused.

"I am not inclined to court poverty to oblige these loyal gentlemen. I've a conviction I shouldn't care for love in a cottage, and a russet gown would be unbecoming to me."

Miss Vandeleur would be beautiful in any dress. I wish with all my heart you had not been born to riches. No man of honour likes to expose himself to the accusation of being a fortune-hunter."

"No man really loving a woman would allow such a thought to come between them. A guilty conscience is its own accuser."

The gallant Captain was puzzled; her face was so smiling and innocent of any intention to hurt, and yet her words carried a great sting with them. He wondered if she could by chance have learned the deplorable emptiness of his exchequer, and the anxiety of his

creditors to obtain but a fraction of their dues, never daring to hope for the whole.

None knew so well as he how necessary it was he should marry a woman with money; birth and beauty he would not insist upon, but a fortune—well, he could not dispense with that.

While he thought thus Bertie's soft eyes were fixed upon him, reading his secret, yet never revealing their knowledge, and when with a smile he came back to the present he saw nothing in her to increase his uneasy thoughts, but something that seemed to put them to flight.

Hirst did not love her, he had put by love long ago, when he said good-bye for ever to a pretty girl, far below him in rank, whose life he had spoiled and whose memory would always haunt him. Yet act loving Bertie had admired her, and would have felt a certain pride in calling her wife.

Despised he would waste her fortune; but in other respects he would be a kind husband, not being a vicious, but merely a weak spendthrift. So now he bent over the girl, conscious that Miss Lomax was watching, and glorying rather than his wealthy rival (as he pleased to call him) had received few signs of favour that night from Miss Vandeleur.

He laid himself out to please, fixed his memory for flattering speeches and lively stories, and when Bertie went away with her next partner was rewarded by her with the few words—

"Thank you, Captain Grey, you are very amusing!"

He would have preferred some other speech—he would have been glad to see a shade of regret on her face as she was led from him; but he tried to possess his soul with patience, and presently might have been seen devoting himself to the next most desirable girl.

She was very plain, very stupid; but she possessed twenty thousand pounds in her own right.

Bertie was rather glad when the guests began to leave; she felt unusually tired, and was possessed with a vague sense of dissatisfaction very unusual to her, and it was with real pleasure that she welcomed the moment in which she might go to her room.

Hirst wished her a somewhat cold good-night. The coldness she ignored with her customary graceful indifference, and in her voice there was not the slightest shadow of change.

Her room adjoined her mother's, and she considerably surprised Mrs. Vandeleur by entering in a pale pink peignoir and her hair unbound. She sat down in a low chair which she drew up to the fire, then with her feet crossed upon the fender, she said,—

"I feel like talking, so I sent Therese away. Are you very tired, mother?"

"Not too tired to have you here, dear. I am rather glad that you have come; I had a question to ask you."

She passed her hand caressingly over her daughter's pretty dark hair.

"Did Hirst say anything to you to-night? I fancied by his manner after supper that he had spoken, and your answer had not been favourable. He seemed to regard you with displeasure. Was it so?"

"As to the displeasure I think I might say yes; but he said nothing to me beyond the merest courtesies. I believe, mother, you may dismiss all idea of his desiring me for his wife," lightly, and meeting the elder lady's glance with pretty unconcern. "Once this evening he fancied I was something to him. I saw it on his face, and but for the stranger's most inopportune appearance would have done me the honour you and Mrs. Lomax wish."

"My dear, the girl's appearance certainly could have nothing to do with the change in his manner. I don't believe in love at first sight, and Hirst's mind is too well-regulated to allow him to form any foolish attachment."

"I think the mind has very little to do with it. If you look back you will find the cleverest men almost invariably have chosen fools for their wives; some have married women one could not receive. I don't see why Hirst Lomax should prove wiser than his fellow-men."

"I am disappointed, my dear. It has been my dearest wish to see you his wife. I shall not give up hope yet. You see, in the event of your marriage with him I should not lose you."

"Just so," quietly, "but you would not angle for a husband for me? I am not so very old yet that you should be anxious to make me wear the matrimonial yoke—twenty-one is comparatively juvenile. Am I such a source of trouble you long to be free of me?"

"You know the contrary, but the mere fact that you are an heiress exposes you to many dangers."

"My dear mother," lightly, "of that I am perfectly aware, and I credit no man with disinterested motives who pretends in the least to my favour. Are you satisfied?" smiling then.

"No. I cannot be blind to Captain Grey's attentions, and he is a notorious spend-thrift."

"I am perfectly aware of that. You need not fear the Captain, and I am not susceptible. Beside which I know a story of his past; Myra Dinwiddie told it me. I suppose most people would not blame him much; but you shall judge for yourself if his conduct calls for rebuke. He was staying at a little town in Essex—Myra was visiting there at the same time—and by some means he became acquainted with a very pretty girl, a milliner, the daughter of a composer. He took every opportunity to waylay her, walk with her, pay her those attentions meet women prize; through him the girl angered her parents, and they compelled her to resign her situation, and sent her to London, where she got employment in a West-end firm. Frank Grey followed her, she having acquainted him by letter of her place of residence. But he did not offer her marriage; he merely bade her good-bye for all time, saying that he was not in a position to make her his wife; and then he left her to her broken heart, her ill-requited faith. She returned to her friends, and Myra heard only yesterday that she is dying of his desertion; and people say he loved her!" scornfully.

"My dear, the story may be exaggerated; doubtless Captain Grey is no worse than other idle young men, and probably the girl was flighty. I don't see how she should get an introduction to him; but of course he is an undesirable husband for you." Miss Vandeleur smiled. "This is hardly like you!" she said, and blushing a little, her mother continued, "if you made an unsuitable engagement in your father's absence, I think he would not forgive my lack of watchfulness. You are the very apple of his eye, to use a homely saying."

"That is gratifying to one's vanity. But you must not be anxious about me. I am as keenly alive to the advantages of a good match as the most worldly mother could wish."

She rose and stood with one elbow on the mantel, and the pink sleeve falling back displayed the whiteness of her pretty arm. Mrs. Vandeleur looked at her in a little surprise.

"You are not like most girls, Bertie. At your age I was romantic, and ready to trust all who professed friendship for me. If there is any defect in your character, it is want of girlish faith and thoughtlessness."

Bertie moved a little so as to command a view of herself in an opposite pier-glass.

"Yet my face is not hard, and my eyes look gentle enough," she said. "I believe I deceive most people."

Then with characteristic abruptness she turned to another subject.

"I wonder who this protege of Miss Priscilla,

may be? From the momentary glimpse I had of her face I should say Hirst's description of her is a true one. I charitably volunteered to help her benefactress, but she declined my assistance with her usual graceful courtesy. I positively believe she hates me."

"I am afraid she does not regard you too favourably; she may even, if it pleases her, prejudice Hirst against you. It is a pity matters were not settled before she returned; she is a woman who will have her own will, cost whatever it may. She would not be careful to spare one's feelings."

"I believe she is incapable of a dishonest action or an untruthful word," Bertie said; "she is at least an open soul, and an encounter with her is rather exhilarating than not. To-morrow I shall defy her by paying a visit to this nameless one. I am decidedly curious."

She sighed a little as she spoke, and looked graver than was her habit.

"I think I'll leave you in peace now, dear; you look so very tired."

She moved forward, and, stooping, kissed her mother upon the cheek.

"Good-night; may your dreams be pleasant."

Then the slim young figure disappeared through the doorway, and was seen no more that night.

In the morning the guests assembled at the breakfast-table, and there ensued a prolonged chorus of good wishes; then each failed in untangling the packages and unsealing the letters lying in little heaps beside his or her plate.

Bertie's pile was a large one, so noticeable so that the gentleman next her said, laughingly, she had "Benjamin's share."

There were exclamations of admiration as she produced a diamond cross, the gift of her father; a gold necklace, with pendants, from her mother; with sundry other presents from friends and admirers. One of the prettiest was a minute copy of "Des Marchen," beautifully illuminated.

With a sudden inspiration she lifted her eyes, and met those of Captain Grey. He looked confused, but she was perfectly calm as she put it down a little apart from her other gifts, and turned to address her left-hand neighbour.

She was disappointed, but she gave no sign of this—amongst all her gifts there was not even a card from Hirst, and she remembered this was the first time he had omitted this courtesy since they had known each other. Perhaps he thought of this, too, and he wondered was she vexed, and looking into her smiling face, said that it answered no.

Breakfast ended, she swept her packages together, leaving none behind but the little "Des Marchen."

Captain Grey followed her to the door with it.

"You have left this," he said, handing it to her, in very obvious embarrassment.

She smiled.

"It is returned with thanks; the acquaintance between us is too slight for me to accept the merest trifle from you."

He still held the drawing to her, and now stammered,—

"But, Miss Vandeleur, the season does away in a measure with formality; and if I am but an acquaintance now, I hope one day to be a very dear friend. Take it. The face reminded me of you; the eyes are precisely yours."

He seemed so much in earnest, so hurt by her refusal, that but for the recollection of the little milliner who lay dying of his desertion" she would have been moved to relenting. As it was, she said, a trifle coldly,—

"My 'no' is always decided. I am sorry you should have compelled me to act in such a seemingly ungracious manner."

Then, with directness, which was robbed of any disagreeable element by the pretty glance which accompanied it,—

"Is there no one who deserves your remembrance more than myself, no one who would be glad of it?"

She saw his face grow a shade paler, and without a word he turned and left her. She looked after his retreating figure with a strange, incomprehensible glance, then she laughed lowly.

"That shot told," she said to herself. "Let him go back to his real love; my fortune is not for him!"

Then she went to her room, and made a becoming toilet, afterwards going to Miss Priscilla's room. That lady was just issuing from it. She glanced keenly at the pretty dark face upturned to hers.

"Well," she said, sharply, "what is it you want?"

"To see the patient," calmly; "I am really interested in her. May I go in, Miss Priscilla?"

Hardly liking to refuse admission, the elder lady answered,—

"I've no objection to that if you can keep your tongue from meddling on, and questioning about matters that don't concern you. I shall be absent only ten minutes, so you had best use your opportunity while you can."

"Thank you," with a slight bow; and she tapped for admittance.

A voice said, "Come in;" and entering Bertie found herself face to face with Miss Priscilla's protégé.

"Good-morning. I hope you are better," she said, mentally taking her vis-a-vis measure.

"Thank you, yes; but I am very weak, and Miss Lomax recommends entire rest and quiet."

"She is an excellent nurse," concisely. "You are wondering who I am, and why I am here? I am Bertie Vandeleur, near neighbour to Miss Lomax, and I have come to wish you a merry Christmas, and get acquainted with you."

She sat down, and the stranger's blue eyes followed all her movements.

She was looking particularly pretty in a sealskin paletot, a brown hat and feathers, brown bow and muff.

"Why do you watch me so intently?"

"I was thinking how pretty you are," in a soft, refined voice, that yet had a dialectic tinge with it.

"Are you Scotch?" Miss Vandeleur asked, loosening her bow. "You have a faint, but very taking 'burr.'"

"My father was a clergyman in the north of England, but we never crossed the border."

"Is he dead? You said 'was,' and your dress is black," her own tones grown gentler.

"Yes, I am an orphan, and quite friendless. I have told Miss Lomax my story."

"Which means I am to ask no more questions; pray don't deny the accusation. I really don't mind, and I'll stifle my curiosity save on one point. Will you tell me your name?"

"Certainly; it is Margaret Ashwin," and as she turned her face full upon her questioner Bertie realised in a flash how lowly she was.

"You could well afford to pronounce me pretty," she said; "you have the face of an angel!"

She rose and shook out her skirts, laughing softly at Margaret's momentary embarrassment. "I must leave you now, the church bells are going and I hate to be late, it creates such a disturbance, so for the present good-bye. Miss Priscilla will more than supply my loss." She reached the door, then looking over her shoulder, said, "If you want lighter reading than Miss Priscilla's library affords, you may draw on mine. I leave the Hall in two days, and shall be happy to send them to you."

On the stairs Hirst overtook her.

"I am afraid you are a little late, Bertie; did your toilet engross all your time since breakfast until now?"

She made a scornful gesture.

"No; I've been to see Margaret Ashwin.

You were right, Hirst; she is very beautiful,

and there is a pathetic, appealing look in her eyes. I expect all you men will be subjugated

in a few days. 'Beauty in distress' and all that sort of thing. I am quite content it should be so. I don't blame you for the folly natural to you, only I do request you won't persistently sound her praises to me—we shall not be friends!'

"You have formed an unreasoning and violent prejudice against her," he said, with annoyance.

"That is possible; but at present I am only conscious of a certain antagonism between our natures—we shan't assimilate; and if she stays here long the Hall will be spoiled for me," very frankly.

"Are you jealous of her physical advantages? Your lot surely compensates for those?" coldly.

Bertie smiled in a superior way.

"I am not jealous, as you surely ought to know. Of what use are a lovely figure and perfect face in these degenerate days? Men are not taken with them provided they are not accompanied by a fortune. What does it matter to me that Miss Ashwin is the taller by three inches? I am the richer, and I shall be courted for my money," with which nasty little shot at his sex she preceded him into the church and took her seat quietly.

When the Christmas Hymn, the old familiar "Adeste Fideles," was sung, he looked curiously at her, and could scarcely believe that the girl beside him, who sang as if her very soul revelled in music, whose eyes wore so rapt an expression, was the same who a few minutes ago calmly expounded worldly sentiments, and dealt in covert gibes and sneers.

He was drawn again towards her; he had long believed one day she would be his wife, and the habit of many years clung about him yet, so that he felt and exhibited a certain air of proprietorship as he bent over her, and it was not until far into the sermon that the pleasant reverie into which he had fallen was broken.

This was done by Bertie herself, who leaning towards him whispered,

"Do you think he will ever finish? I'm so hungry!"

He could not help smiling down into her brown eyes; but when this remark was followed by one bordering on levity, he frowned slightly.

Apparently his displeasure did not have the desired effect; the girl only looked down with mock demureness, and shrugged her shoulders. The long, dark lashes lay upon her cheeks that were a little flushed.

Hirst noted the pretty droop of the lips, the soft curves of chin and throat, and his displeasure passed.

Perhaps Miss Vandeleur knew the power of that half childlike look, perhaps she was not so unconscious of his scrutiny as she appeared. Presently she glanced up at him and smiled in her most gracious manner, and so peace was made.

When they left the church the sun was shining brightly, making the whole earth one glittering field of white; the air was keen, the snow trodden hard so that walking was pleasant.

"Bertie," the young man said, after a pause in their light chat; "you're very gracious now; I wonder why you need assume those little worldly airs, and flout a fellow so terribly as you do sometimes. You're a deal nicer in this mood. Promise to remain in it for the rest of the day?"

"My friend," Miss Vandeleur replied, laughing; "I'm nothing if not capricious; that is my forte."

CHAPTER II.

It was the evening of Boxing Day, and Bertie Vandeleur stood in the library, one foot resting on the fender, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed. Perhaps she guessed how well she looked in white, for again her dress was colourless; it was of lace, and she wore antique ornaments of pearl. Her hair

was dressed very much in the style of a Greek water-girl's, and three strings of pearls shone in its dusky masses. She was fair enough to satisfy a more rigorous judge of female beauty than Hirst Lomax, and there was a gracious gravity in her expression that pleased the young man as he entered.

"What are you doing here, Bertie? It is unlike you to court solitude!" and he crossed to her side.

"Oh, I thought I'd get a little quiet before dinner—there will be none after. I've been reading"—she held up a Tennyson for his inspection—"and I've just finished 'Maud.'

"A very lively poem to read on a festive day," he answered, taking the book from her, and turning the leaves slowly and thoughtfully.

He had come to her with a purpose; half-an-hour ago his mother had said, "When will you give me my daughter, Hirst?" and he, being used to the idea of marrying Bertie, and not conscious of caring for any other woman so well, had mentally decided to settle his fate that night.

The girl saw the unusual thoughtfulness of his manner, and asked,—

"What is it, Hirst? You look as if you are on the eve of a desperate action. May I know the cause of this ultra-gravity?"

He laid aside the book, and took her hands.

"Yes, Bertie, you may. I have come to ask you a question—will you marry me?"

"No, I won't."

Her answer was so emphatic, so distinctly opposite to that which he had expected, that he was staggered. At first he could find nothing to say, but when she attempted to free her hands his words came fast and excitedly,—

"You can't mean that—we have always been accustomed to the idea of our marriage; our people have always wished it, and you have never seemed to dislike me. Mr. Vandeleur will be disappointed."

She broke in with utmost coolness,—

"That is not my fault. Thank you for the honour you have done me, but I know my own value."

"You don't mean you fancy I want your fortune?" with hot indignation, his eyes flashing angrily.

"I'm not quite so unjust. When I said I know my own value I meant no man shall take me on tolerance. You have done yourself and me a wrong—it remains for us to forget it."

"But, Bertie," moved, perhaps, to greater warmth because of her resistance, "give me a chance. I dare say I said what I had to say very clumsily. You must remember I am a novice at this sort of thing"—smiling faintly—"but I did not mean to imply that you were so little to me that my wooing need be but careless. I'm not going to say I am moved to rapture when you are near—somehow I can't believe in love as the novelists describe it—but I've a very honest affection for you, and I believe we should be a happier couple than many amongst our acquaintances."

"You hold out very great inducements to me," she said, scoffingly. "Shall I exchange a certain present for a doubtful future, and for a man who in wooing me declares he does not love me? Ah! thank you, thank you, I am honoured too far," and she made him a mocking obeisance.

He began to grow angry, and he bit his nether lip fiercely to keep down the passionate words.

Bertie stood with flushed face, not attempting to help him, and finally he was compelled to break the silence.

"I did not think you prized sentiment. You have invariably voted it a bore when it has been spoken of."

"So it is in the abstract, but every woman likes her future lord to profess a sentimental regard for her, even though she knows he lies—"

Hirst broke in fiercely,—

"Do you want me to play the humbug?"

"No, there are so many ready to take that part that I should advise you to adhere to your role of honesty—it's unique and interesting—"

And there he stopped her with a quick gesture and a fiery torrent of words,—

"I don't want a dissertation on honesty, but I do insist upon being treated as a man, and not one of those who pretend to the name, and who meet with so much kindness from you. If I don't love you in the theatrical way you desire I have always esteemed and been fond of you, and if this does not content you, why let us go back to the old relationship—you on your part sure I did you the greatest honour in my power; I on mine satisfied you acted wisely. But, for Heaven's sake, keep your gibes for a more patient man. I for one shall not receive them tamely. I am not of the kiss-for-a-blow party, and may easily be goaded into forgetfulness of your sex, and to say what in a calmer mood I should be ashamed to remember. I can be very hard."

"Do you tell me that thinking to change my decision? Really the method you use to win a woman is a trifle too suggestive of the way in which the Conqueror won his wife. To all your flattering proposals I say no. Pray consider the subject closed."

"With pleasure," bitterly. "I at least credited you with very real womanliness and courtesy."

"Pray disabuse your mind of such chimeras," plucking the flowers at her bosom apart leaf by leaf, and strewing them at her feet; "try to accept me as I am—a logical and worldly girl, such as only the nineteenth century can produce. At least you must acquit me of any attempt to bring about this dénouement!"

"I shall do you justice. But tell me, Bertie, is this decision final? Do you hold out no hope?"

"Do you wish to be certain of your reprise?" mockingly; then with sudden, fierce earnestness, "yes, it is final. Now, hear why. Because our marriage would be 'convenient'; because 'our people' wish it you have asked me to cast in lots with you; but you never really desired it. Do you think I will be thrust upon you, whether you will or no? Do you think I will unite myself to a man whose heart has yet to be awakened, who, when too late, may learn the lesson of love, and hate me for my consent to an old entreaty? I will tell you no! Take that for my answer, and leave me."

The force, the fire with which she had spoken, the new light in her eyes surprised him. She did not seem to see this, but hurried on,—

"You have insulted me grossly; I would not easily forgive you but for the recollection of old days, when neither of us dreamed what a prosaic ending our friendship would have, remembering that I am willing to forget, and be your friend—nothing more."

"But, Bertie," moved to keen admiration, "if my feelings towards you undergo a change, if I find you are dearer to me than any other woman, will you let me speak then—will you listen?"

She stood silent a moment; then answered,—

"Yes, you may speak, but I promise nothing. I may hear, and be sorry; I may hear, and be moved—who knows? Hearts are strange things!"

"If I have hurt your womanly pride and dignity I beg your forgiveness; if I have transgressed any rule of courtesy in my conduct towards you I can only say I am sorry, and shall be glad to atone for my transgression in any way you demand—only let us be friends, Bertie."

"With all my heart," laughing softly. "Aren't you glad our interview has had so sensible an ending?"

"In a state of confusion he said,—

"I—I am relieved. I am fond of my bachelor freedom."

"One day you will be equally 'fond' of some

woman; then you will be glad you did not marry the girl you were pleased to call the Christmas Fairy. Now, if you please, go. Stay, I have spoiled my flowers. Will you beg some more of Bell, and bring them here to me?"

He went out to do her bidding, and she watched him with a curious look in her eyes. Then she sighed softly and sat down, resting her chin in her hollowed palms.

"How queer everything is," she said.

At dinner Miss Priscilla asked,—

"Why have you not visited Miss Ashwin to-day?"

And Bertie, with the demurest of expressions, answered,—

"Really, Miss Lomax, that seems an unnecessary question. I am so constantly reminded that I am an intruder that there is small wonder I avoid your apartments."

Miss Priscilla made no retort. She knew the girl's words were too true to admit a denial. She sat discussing her soup in a thoughtful mood; then suddenly, in a low tone,—

"I don't like you, Bertie, and you know it. Let that go. But young people naturally crave for companions of their own age; so if you choose to associate with Miss Ashwin you shall not complain of inhospitable treatment."

"Thank you. I'll give the matter my careful consideration"—so coolly that Miss Priscilla's pale face grew red. "What do you propose doing with the distressed damsel?"

"I will tell you to-morrow if you will form one of the party in the library. Rest assured she shall want for nothing whilst Priscilla Lomax lives; and I think you know my word is my bond," sternly.

"I do; I also know you are a very honest woman in all things. Now, I don't pretend to honesty myself; but I admire it in others;" then she leaned back and broke into a perfect ripple of laughter at Miss Priscilla's look of horrified surprise.

Captain Grey addressed her from the opposite side of the table.

"What is the joke, Miss Vandeleur? May I share it?"

The maiden lady looked "daggers" as the girl answered,—

"I am afraid not; but I will prefer your request to Miss Lomax if you really wish it."

"Pray, do. I am devoured by curiosity!" And to Bertie's infinite glee that lady snapped,—

"I wish you joy of your state," and for the remainder of the evening ignored their very existence.

The following morning Hirst, his mother, and aunt, Mrs. Vandeleur and Margaret Ashwin sat waiting Bertie's coming. An ominous frown was on Miss Priscilla's brow at the girl's remissness.

"I told her eleven precisely, and it is now half-past," referring to the watch she had placed before her on the table. "I shall wait five minutes longer, then shall proceed without her. Madam," to Mrs. Vandeleur, "it is a pity you did not teach your daughter the value of time. Hirst, step into the gardens. Perhaps you will find her there."

The young man rose reluctantly. He had been feasting his eyes with Margaret's rare loveliness, and was disinclined to lose one thrill of pleasure it gave him.

She was looking very beautiful and very pathetic. The dressing-gown, which was one of her lady friends, being rose-colour, gave just the necessary tinge to her otherwise pale face. Her large dark eyes, shadowed by black lashes, were soft and appealing—altogether she made so dainty a picture that Mrs. Lomax felt uneasy.

Before Hirst could leave the room Bertie entered, and quietly divesting herself of hat, cape, and gloves sat down, without apologising for her late appearance. Miss Priscilla, however, did not attempt to hide her displeasure.

"Do you understand," she asked, icily, "that you have tacitly insulted Miss Ashwin

and myself? I'm inclined to think you don't, as you attempt no apology."

The most provoking of smiles played about Miss Vandeleur's lips, and lit up her great brown eyes.

"My dear Miss Lomax, it was surely unnecessary to wait for me, and I did not suppose you would so far depart from your rules as to do so;" and she met Hirst's angry look with superlative calmness.

The maiden lady treated her remark this time with silent contempt; and when each one felt sufficiently uncomfortable she broached the subject.

Miss Ashwin has confided her story to me, and asked me to relate it to you. Willing to save her any pain resulting from so sad a recital I have promised to do so. That she is a lady I think you are all convinced. Her father was the vicar of Terresdale, a small place in Northumberland; her mother has been dead many years; her father died six months ago."

Bertie glanced at the girl carelessly; then resumed her gentle tattoo upon the table.

"With the exception of her mother's sister, who had married well, she was alone in the world, twenty pounds being her whole fortune. Relying on this aunt's generosity until she could find work she instantly started for Doncaster, but met with so frigid, so heartless a reception that she left the house the next day, and hired a room in a cheap part of the town. Here she set to work to obtain a situation, but failed. Her education did not fit her for a governess; there was nothing open to her but such places as mothers' helps or companions are called upon to fill.

"She answered advertisement after advertisement, but all to no purpose; and at last, when her little money was almost gone, she saw one that promised well; it was at Mrs. Lawes's, at Yelverton, and the lady requested all applicants to apply personally. Miss Ashwin had not sufficient cash left to pay her train fare, and no ornaments of which she could dispose, and so she determined to walk the distance. But she lost her way, and at last fell amongst the snow from sheer fatigue. But for my passing that night would have been her last on earth. Now, I ask you not only for your compassion, but your friendship for this poor lonely child. I ask nothing more; all other things I am prepared to give myself."

"This is very romantic," Bertie whispered. "There remains nothing for Miss Ashwin to do now but marry the Fairy Prince."

Hirst Lomax frowned. After all it was well Bertie had refused him—so he thought.

"I have telephoned to Doncaster, and learned that Miss Ashwin's friends have sailed for Canada, so that she is virtually without a relative. Now, I propose she should not apply to Mrs. Lawes, but remain with me as my companion. I am getting too old now for my correspondence; she would be a great help to me; but of course, sister, I defer to you, as mistress of the Hall. What do you say to my proposal?"

"That it sounds very sensible," Mrs. Lomax answered, hurriedly; "and in pleasing yourself, Priscilla, you will please me. I hope, Miss Ashwin, you will find your new life and new home pleasant."

"Thank you, madam; you are too kind!" Margaret said, a tremor in her low voice that touched the lady.

"Mrs. Vandeleur, I shall be glad if you will allow an intimacy between these two girls. Remember, Margaret is to be treated as one of ourselves. May I rely upon you and Bertie?"

Mrs. Vandeleur hesitated a moment. "I shall be happy to receive Miss Ashwin; but Bertie must answer for herself—she is whimsical."

"Thanks, mother; I perfectly appreciate the compliment; and, Miss Priscilla, if you are not afraid of my corrupting influence, I am ready to promise eternal friendship, as girls are fond of doing. They invariably for-

get the promise; but 'sufficient to the day is the evil.'"

And the lady, not liking the tone of her reply, yet made no angry retort, being glad to win Bertie over, even on her own terms.

So it was decided Margaret should stay, and Miss Priscilla set to work to replenish her companion's wardrobe. In vain the girl protested she could not accept so much from her; her expostulations only made the lady more generous—more eager to have her own will.

One thing she did that was hardly fair: she had Margaret's black dresses modelled precisely after the style of Bertie, much to that young lady's disgust.

The only articles of dress in which the girls differed were their hats—Bertie affected large and Margaret small ones. Bertie wore her hair in a bang; Margaret's was drawn back in waving masses from her low white forehead.

One day Miss Vandeleur sat alone in a snug room she called her studio—for she dabbled in art—when Margaret was announced. However brusque or scornful the former might be at Lomax Hall she was all courtesy and hospitality at home; and the companion found the change in her as pleasing as it was surprising.

She rose, laid aside her palette and brush, and shook hand with her visitor.

"Pray remove your wraps, Miss Ashwin; the room is warm. I am like exotics, and flourish only in a warm atmosphere. Let me place your chair nearer the fire. Ah! I see you like heat—that is a link between us," smiling, and showing her pretty white teeth.

"Miss Lomax has sent me with some prints—she said you wished to copy in water-colours—and she hopes you will not regard them as a loan, but a gift!" producing a small packet and laying it on the table.

"Oh! you must thank her many times for me, and I will come up to the Hall myself to-morrow. Will you tell Miss Priscilla we have heard from my father, and that he hopes to be with us in early March. Mother is simply mad with delight."

She drew her own chair up to the fire and sat down opposite her visitor.

"Will you lunch with us? We shall be pleased if you will. Oh! I will not take no for an answer, and I'll send a messenger to Miss Lomax. Now," with her feet upon the fender, her hands clasped about her knees, which attitude was a favourite one with her, "tell me something about yourself. If we are to be friends we must indulge in little confidences. See, I will spread my life like a book before you. From babyhood I have been indulged and flattered, not for any good or beauty people saw in me, but because I am one of the greatest heiresses in England. I have had admirers and lovers (such as they were), and I have never had an unsatisfied wish; I have flirted rather more than most girls, and there isn't either man or maid I can call my friend. But I am content, more than content. There is my history in a few words; it is very uneventful. Did you spend all your days at Terresdale, Miss Ashwin? Didn't you find it dull?"

"Yes, to both questions. My childhood was painful, miserable. I had no playmates, and we received no visitors; my father could not enter into my moods, my fancies. I grew up into neglected girlhood, filled with longings for a sight of the outer world. My heart grew bitter; I hated the narrow round in which I moved, the familiar faces of the peasants about me," and then the deep blue eyes flashed, and Margaret Ashwin's beauty took another aspect. "I hated the gloomy church and the dreary service. My one accomplishment is drawing. My father never allowed me to learn music, lest 'my heart should turn wholly to it.' Those were his words, and if sometimes I broke into song I was admonished that psalms were the proper expression of joy and praise. Oh! when I think of those days, and the bitter results of that bitter training, I am inclined to revenge

myself on all I meet for my sufferings and what they have made me!"

She had risen, and now paced the room agitatedly.

Bertie watched her a moment, kindling into admiration of the wonderful grace of her movements; the fire of her altered beauty.

Then she sprang up and caught Margaret's hands.

"Go on, I understand this mood, tell me all; I am ready to pity. Protest that your rage against your teachings, your fate, is just; it exalts you in my esteem, it draws me to you. Go on."

But Margaret, after one startled glance, dropped again into her ordinary quiet, the only differences being in her voice, which seemed laboured.

"No, I have said more than enough, Miss Vandeleur; more than I intended saying. Let my past rest; it is sufficient to say that my present is as a dream of paradise to it!"

Bertie made a wry grimace.

"Your last words tell me much. What must your past have been!"

And throughout Margaret's stay she was kindly, and almost affectionate.

But when her beautiful visitor had left she stood thoughtfully watching the slowly retreating figure, with its graceful, undulating movements.

"What a fool I was to allow myself to be beguiled! I distrust her, and I dislike her!"

After that day Margaret often went to the "Robinettes," as Mr. Vandeleur's house was called, and once she begged Bertie to address her by her Christian name.

Bertie hesitated a moment, then said,—

"I don't care for it; Margaret has a harsh sound;" but seeing a hurt look on her visitor's face answered, "Well, let it be as you choose, Margaret."

And so they fell into the way of calling each other Bertie and Margaret, and Miss Lomax seemed pleased at the intimacy between them.

One day as they sat together Margaret said,—

"Miss Priscilla was speaking of you this morning, and she said Mr. Lomax asked you once to marry him. Didn't you love him that you said no?" and paused in some trepidation as to the nature of Bertie's answer.

It came very carelessly and smilingly.

"My dear child, with my fortune I might do better; and I have another reason for my rejection. Would you marry a man who asked you to do so from a sense of duty? who distinctly told you he 'did not love you, but you were not unpleasant to him?'—and probably a marriage with him would mean an ordinary, jog-trot, neutral-tinted existence. The honour done me seemed scarcely equal to the risk I should incur!"

She turned towards the window, then back again quickly.

"Come here, Margaret!" and Miss Ashwin moved to her side. "Do you see Hirst at the lodge-gates? He is coming here after an absence of three weeks. Imagine how flattered I am, and how anxious he must be to win my favour!"

Margaret blushed slightly, and Bertie seeing it asked abruptly,—

"How old are you?"

The question seemed so irrelevant that the other said, with a slow, amused smile,—

"Twenty-two!"

Miss Vandeleur touched her hand.

"With your beauty you haven't reached that age without having had a lover!"

"No; you are right!" a painful flush spreading over the white cheek and brow, "I had one once!"

"And his fate? May I know it?" in a mottled, interested way that did service sometimes for sympathy.

"I did not love him, so I treated him badly, and I lost him. Perhaps I am incapable of love," dreamily.

"That is a very ordinary failing. I myself plead guilty to it," laughing softly; "why,

you look incredulous," and as Hirst now entered, the conversation changed suddenly.

Bertie met him in her most careless manner, for there was a growing coldness between them, dating from Margaret's admission to the Hall, and the heiress's keen eyes could not be blind to the fact that her lover was going over to the enemy, as she privately called Margaret; but she made no attempt to win him to admiration of herself, rather left him to be entertained by his aunt's companion.

She withdrew to a far end of the room, and soon appeared deeply interested in a book of etchings. She played a very inconspicuous part in the conversation, and when her visitors rose to go neither pressed them to stay nor call again. She watched them go with a curious smile in her eyes, and a disdainful expression about her pretty mouth.

"How pleased Mrs. Lomax will be!" with somewhat bitter triumph; then sighed to herself, "somehow I don't like losing my cavaliere, and it won't be pleasant to meet Margaret Ashwin as the lady of the Hall."

Meanwhile the two, so unconscious of her thoughts, walked on side by side, Hirst intent upon his companion's beauty. There was a faint flush on the high-bred, usually pale face, a mere thoughtful expression in the lovely eyes, an air of weariness about every movement that appealed peculiarly to Hirst Lomax.

"You are ill or tired?" he said, gently, and the blue eyes were lifted a moment to his, as Margaret answered,—

"A little tired, Mr. Lomax, but not ill—some words of Miss Vandeleur's roused old, unhappy memories; events and people I have wished to forget come crowding back upon me—the recollection of the past is always painful," smiling faintly at his evident concern.

"Are you happy with us?" he questioned, abruptly; "is there anything you wish altered. Speak frankly."

"My life at the Hall is very peaceful," she said, slowly. "I have nothing to wish for but Bertie's friendship."

"But that you have?" surprisedly; "she always displays a great interest in you."

"Yes; I am aware of that, but I have only the semblance of friendship from her. She is too honest to mislead me as to the state of her affections. Perhaps if I am very patient I shall win her to me. I hope so, she is so clever, so good in her strange way, and so pretty. I think her eyes are the most wonderful I have ever seen."

"You praise generously," he said, almost angry she should command Bertie, as it were, to his notice, "but unwisely. Your very partiality makes you blind to her faults; she is clever, but saffical; pretty because of her vivacity; when that goes she will be plain; her features are very irregular. Her eyes, I admit, are wonderful, but I prefer blue to brown," with a glance bordering on tenderness, "and tall girls to their shorter sisters."

A deep blush came over Margaret's throat and face, fading out quickly, and leaving her pale, and a little tremulous.

The young man spoke again, this time very confusedly.

"Do you know, Miss Ashwin, I once asked Bertie to be my wife, and so recently as last Boxing Day? She refused, and now I am glad she did."

"Miss Lomax told me of the affair," quietly; "and she said, too, both your mother and Mrs. Vandeleur were very greatly disappointed. Your mother is much attached to Bertie, I believe."

"Yes, that is so; and Mrs. Vandeleur is anxious to keep her daughter near her. From childhood we have been destined for each other. Perhaps if this had not been the case I might have fallen a victim to her charms. But I am at a loss to think why we are wasting valuable time in discussing Bertie Vandeleur. I wanted to speak to you of yourself. I believe you are without relatives in England; have no trusty friend but my aunt. Is it not so?" and she bowed her head.

"Well, I want you to think of me as one anxious for your welfare and happiness—eager to advance your pleasure in all things. Will you remember this?"

Her face changed and whitened before him; in her eyes there was a look he could not understand.

"Oh!" and her voice was full of tears, "you are too good, too generous to me, Mr. Lomax. How do you know I am not an adventuress? How do you know that my past was not shameful?"

He caught her hands and laughed blithely.—

"It is useless to attempt to sow suspicion in my mind. I know you for what you are—a pure and noble woman; and I have never desired to please any woman as I desire now to please you, Margaret."

Again she flushed, and this time sighed, whilst a look of pain darkened her blue eyes.

"It is good to believe in you—good to have known one who trusts me; in the past some who should have been tender to me were harsh and inconsistent. Oh! I have not been happy. If I had had some joy in my life I might have been a better woman," and through her voice there rang a sound of bitter pain.

"If you were better," Hirst said, smiling, "you would be an illustration of the poet's words, and prove too good for human nature's daily food," but Margaret shook her head.

"You do not understand."

They had reached the drive leading up to the Hall, and Mrs. Lomax, looking from the window, saw them coming slowly towards the house.

"Priscilla," she said, a trifle sharply; "is that wise? Will you allow your protégé to risk her happiness with my son? Do you see he looks down at her as he never did at Bertie."

"I see all that, sister," with a pleased smile, "and shall be heartily glad if Bertie marries Margaret. She is very dear to me—is a lady; and as for fortune, Philippa, if that is what troubles you, I intend giving her a suitable dowry if she marries to please me. What objection can you raise to her? Is she not beautiful, gentle, industrious—good in everything where Bertie Vandeleur fails? I am surprised at you, sister! Is your son's happiness nothing to you? For my own part, I did not credit Hirst with the nice discernment he has shown. Look at the girl—did you ever see a more perfect face and form, a more graceful carriage? She was born to be a countess!"

"Why, then, Priscilla, don't rob the Earl of his bride," Mrs. Lomax said, almost angrily. You always were unjust to Bertie—she is the dearest, prettiest, cleverest girl of our set."

"And the richest," interpolated the elderly maiden. "My dear Philippa, money is the root of all evil."

Mrs. Lomax stitiched industriously at some fine white work, a cloud on her usually placid face, her lips compressed, and when the young people entered she did not look up or offer any remark.

Hirst looked keenly at her, and, as soon as they were left together, asked,—

"What's wrong, mother?" and leisurely lit a cigar as he spoke.

The lady looked up, a flush on her cheeks. "What is wrong? Surely you ought to know. If you are amusing yourself with Margaret Ashwin, you should be ashamed of yourself; and if you are in earnest I think you must be mad."

"According to you, then, I am a knave or a fool. Well, really, if it makes no difference to you, I prefer being a fool. The fact is, mother, I am in earnest, and hope before long to give you a daughter."

"Margaret Ashwin?" irately. "What do you know of her antecedents? How can you tell her version of the story is true? Will you introduce a possible adventuress into the family—mix puddle-blood with ours—that has been so unsullied by any base strain? I wonder at you, Hirst!"

He flushed hotly.

"You are not taking a just view of it

mother. Aunt proved Miss Ashwin's story true; her family somewhat more than respectable. If she is willing to trust me I will make her my wife, hoping you will overcome your prejudice. And, please, remember that whatever comes I shall not marry Bertie; my eyes have been opened, and I know such a step would result in certain misery to us both. I am sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot consent to spoil my own life and Margaret's—if, as I hope, she loves me—because of an old agreement to which I was never a party. I cannot think one's parents have any right to control or arrange one's marriage."

Mrs. Lomax was prudently silent, but her heart was sore against Margaret. It was true the girl's beauty, grace and gentleness had won upon her; but Bertie was her favourite, and she was unwilling to yield her place to any other.

But Hirst had chosen for himself. He knew what was best for his happiness, he was not a boy, having completed his twenty-sixth year, and Mrs. Lomax could only hope that something would occur to disentangle him.

She insisted upon having Bertie more frequently at the Hall, continually sounded her praises, which was foolish, and Miss Priscilla laughed at her sister-in-law's want of diplomacy.

"Philippa will disgust Hirst with that Vandeleur girl, and hasten his declaration to Margaret."

The good lady was very true in her friendships, very implacable in her hates; quixotic and generous to a fault, but her nature was so distinctly opposed to Bertie's that there was little wonder the two did not agree.

It was in early March, and Bertie was dining at the Hall. Dinner was announced at five, and the whole party gathered about the table, and soon the ripple of gay voices and low laughter made echoes in the house.

The sounds of merriment reached a man crossing the large front lawn. He paused a moment, a smile on his lips.

"That was Bertie," he said to himself, and as he spoke the girl turned her face towards one of the windows.

Then those present heard a little murmuring cry of gladness, saw her start from her seat, and a minute after she was on the lawn, her arms about the stranger's neck.

"Oh! my dear, my darling old dad!" and the man did not speak for gladness, as he caught his child to his breast and felt her happy tears upon his cheeks.

She clung about him in a very passion of welcome, then leaning back held him from her a little way to see if any change had come to him, and being satisfied with her scrutiny, caught him to herself again and drew his tall head a moment on her bosom.

Then he found power to speak calmly.—

"Come in, dear; the wind is north-east and your dress is thin."

"As if I could remember that now you are here!" reproachfully, "Oh! how I have missed you!" and she leaned on his arm as they went back to the house.

Mr. Vandeleur received a very warm welcome; and Bertie, with one arm thrown about his shoulder, her face pale with excitement, her eyes filled with tears (to Hirst's surprise), introduced him to Margaret with every appearance of pride in him. Then she turned to Mrs. Lomax.—

"You will excuse us, I know; father has come to take me home. This first night we should all like to be together. I wonder how he prevailed on mother to spare him even for an hour, so soon after his unexpected return?"

CHAPTER III.

MISS VANDELEUR bent down and gave her hand to Margaret, whilst Mr. Vandeleur, reining in his horse, cast a somewhat displeased look upon Hirst.

"We are going to the meet, so cannot stay to gossip," Bertie said; "but we will tell you

all the news this evening when we come up; till then good-bye!" and she started her horse at a gallop, her father keeping by her side in silence.

At last he asked,—

"When does Hirst Lomax mean to speak?" She smiled as she answered.

"He has spoken, and been declined with thanks. I hope, dear, you aren't angry?—but really I prefer staying with you to reigning at the Hall."

"I am very much disappointed; I had so set my heart on the match. Is it quite hopeless to wish it still?"

"Oh! quite. Once he tolerated me, now I believe he detests me. Besides, father, you must see for yourself that he has formed an attachment for Miss Ashwin. You must find me another husband," laughing, and then they were joined by a fair, rather handsome man, who greeted Bertie with some effusion.

"I was afraid you wouldn't show up, Miss Vandeleur. I said I should be content if you did, but I'm not. I now wish you were to ride with the hounds. You are too good a horsewoman not to join the hunt!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lanark; but really I think I could not screw my courage up to such a pitch. I should lose my head, and when once I do that there is small hope of my recovering my balance for hours."

"I passed two of our friends on the road, Lomax and that lovely girl, Miss Ashwin. I think you call her."

"Yes; they make a very handsome pair," her soft, bright eyes meeting his archly, and she smiled.

"Do you believe he will marry her? Won't it be somewhat of a *messalliance*?" he questioned.

"I should say he won't be such a fool!" Mr. Vandeleur said; but Bertie broke in lightly,—

"He could not give the Hall a lovelier mistress. She is a lady by birth, a clergyman's daughter, and Miss Lomax has promised her a dowry. So you see Hirst will not prove himself so very foolish."

"Ah! speaking of Miss Lomax, she is very eccentric; instance her whim for this unknown girl."

"She is a worthy woman, Mr. Lanark, and," laughing, "I take credit to myself for saying it, because she hates me as a certain friend of ours is said to hate holy water. I suppose we part here?" and as Mr. Lanark rode away he thought,—

"It is quite true; she never cared for him. She is a pretty girl, but too sharp of tongue, too fond of coquetry; in all probability she will degenerate into a cross old maid. It seems a pity. I always thought Lomax indifferent to her. I was right!"

That night the Vandeleurs dined at the Hall, and Bertie was looking her prettiest in a gauzy black dress, draperies of cream and crimson, with ribbons and flowers to match. She found matters rather dull, especially when Hirst and Margaret wandered out, as it was growing their habit to do now the nights were bright. She yawned behind her fan, then rose and played a few airs in a desultory fashion, and whilst she played Hirst was telling his love-story under a starry sky. He had brought Margaret into the ladies'-walk—a narrow path shaded by tall cedars, and leading to a rockery; he had been very silent throughout the walk, and was now embarrassed—an usual thing with him. As she leaned against a tree he stood looking at her with passionate admiration and love; he moved nearer and took one of her slender hands in his. In the clear light of the newly-risen moon he saw her face grow paler, and the long lashes drooping hid her beautiful eyes.

"Margaret," he said and paused, whilst a tremor passed over her; and again, "Margaret, do you know why I have brought you here?" and still she did not answer, only he thought her fingers returned his clasp. "My darling, I want you for my wife. I have no

thing to plead that may win your favour, if indeed you do not love me. I have no merit, no goodness, my only recommendation is, I love you with all my life," then he waited for her to speak.

He saw the red lips quiver, and when she lifted her eyes they shone bright through tears.

"Mr. Lomax," she said, "you do me too much honour. You seem to forget my position in your house, and utterly scout the idea that my past may have a story that would displease you—shame you. You know nothing of me or mine save what I have told you, and it is scarcely probable that I should give you any but the most favourable account."

She ceased, and he said, with simple manliness,—

"I love you," and threw an arm about her. "Is it ye to my prayer?"

Her chin dropped on her breast as she spoke, hurriedly,—

"It is hard to plead against oneself—hard to refuse so dear a blessing as your love, and yet I would be just to you. I want ye to remember I am poor, unknown, friendless—that Mrs. Lomax wishes to see Bertie your wife. Oh! I am afraid that in the future you will be sorry for this—will regret what cost you so much," and with her free hand she covered her eyes.

But Hirst clasped her closer, and, bending, kissed her throat and waving hair.

"Dear, do you love me?"

And she answered, falteringly,—

"Yes—yes. So much that I am afraid to marry you."

He laughed outright.

"Dismiss that fear, Margaret. I shall never be sorry because of to-night—I shall never be less proud of, less glad in you," and the stars shone down upon them as they plighted their troth.

A long while after they sauntered through the conservatories, talking lovers' talk. Hirst with his arm passed about Margaret's waist. They paused once in the midst of flowers and ferns, and the young man caught her to his heart as he told her again and again of his love; and neither of them saw the white face that peered at them through green leaves, nor the slim hands clenched, as a slight figure fell back upon the garden-seat with eyes dreadfully staring.

In utter, happy ignorance they moved on, and no sound, save their footsteps, broke the stillness, but when the last echoes of that slow tread died away a woman's voice wailed,—

"Oh, Heaven! I love him!—love him!—love him!" and a pair of white hands went up to cover the dreadfully staring brown eyes.

Then there was a little rustling sound of woman's skirts, and in that moment Bertie slipped to the ground and hid her face in her folded arms. She laid her brow to the cold seat as if to cool the fever there, and moaned helplessly,—

"I loved him! and he never knew! Oh! Heaven! he never cared!"

Then she started up. There were no tears in her shining eyes, but her face was ghastly. She wrung her locked hands together, then clasping them behind her head, stood silent and motionless.

From the house came the sound, "In the Gloaming," and she knew it was Margaret who sang, and probably Hirst who accompanied her. The clear soprano rose and fell with bell-like distinctness, and the closing words reached the unhappy girl where she stood,—

"For my heart was crushed with longing,
What had been could never be;
It was best to leave you thus, dear,
Best for you, and best for me."

"He will never know!" she said again, in a wailing tone. "I—I always loved him, but I never guessed it! He did not even wish it! He thought me slight and foolish! bitter of tongue! He saw no beauty in me!"

She heard her father's voice calling her, and

she crouched down behind the ferns, fearing he would seek her. She heard, too, his step close by. He passed so near she could have touched him, but she kept in hiding until he turned and re-entered the house. Then she rose and mechanically smoothed her hair and her dress, and laughed low and bitterly.

"I said when I lost my head I was like a horse, and could not easily recover my balance."

Then she went wearily treading her way amidst choice flowers and plants, whose odour sickened her. She was faint and giddy, and there was no friendly support near. She staggered on with wild, white face, and eyes that saw nothing. Reaching the Hall she guided her steps with hands that feebly felt the wall, and when her father's voice beside her (yet sounding so far away) struck on her numbed senses, she threw her arms about him.

"Take me home, father; take me home. I—I am very ill."

He caught her up like a child, but she winced under his touch, for mental had induced physical pain.

"Put me down, dear; you hurt me! Oh, Heaven! Am I dying?"

Mr. Vandeleur, much alarmed, did as she bade him, only he kept his arm about her to support the faltering steps. Suddenly she paused.

"Don't take me where they all are. I can't meet them to-night. Tell them I am ill—anything, anything, so that you keep them from me."

He drew her into the library, and compelled her to lie down; then he went to acquaint their hostess with Bertie's sudden illness. The girl lay perfectly quiet, with closed lids and ghastly face, only her breath came with a laboured effort, and it seemed to her life was slipping away from her in a terrible nightmare. Then came the soft rustle of her mother's skirts, but she was incapable of movement or speech, could not lift her heavy lids. The elder lady knelt down.

"Darling, what is it?" and when no answer came turned to Mr. Vandeleur. "Michael, lift her head, she has fainted; and when he had done so the mother forced some sal volatile through the clenched teeth.

Bertie was perfectly aware of all they said and did; she strove to sign them it was so, but could not; the petted heiress, the laughing, wayward beauty had got her first cruel blow, and she had sunk beneath it.

"Shall we send for Dr. Musgrave?" questioned the father, anxiously, but the mother said,—

"No, she would not like it. Is the carriage ready? If so, we will take her home. First make my adieu to the company, Michael."

A few minutes after the heavy white lids lifted.

"Mother, take me home," the girl said feebly and faintly.

"Soon, my darling!" throwing a thick shawl about the slender figure, and then her father entering they led her slowly through the hall, and lifted her into the carriage, where she sank as if wearied out. Mrs. Lomax went out to them.

"I am very much concerned about the poor child; pray send me news of her to-morrow early. If she is no better I shall come up to the Robinettes. Good-bye; good-bye, Bertie," but the girl did not answer, and in utter silence she was driven home.

Oh! what a blessed relief it was to be once more in her own room, free from curious eyes, free to look as she pleased, to wail and cry, if by such means she could comfort her agonised heart.

Mrs. Vandeleur would fain have spent the night with her, but Bertie would not have it so.

"No, I am better, and would rather be alone. I will not spoil your rest, mother. Perhaps, too, I shall sleep; I am very tired."

Tired, ah; yes, with a weariness that would cling to her day after day; so tired that her nights would be often sleepless and always

cruel, and the bright spring days would wake no sense of pleasure in her, and the glory of summer would fail to gladden or soften her heart.

For one man's sake her world was changed, and she knew, mock as she would at love, it would be her life-long portion, and on that night she could have cursed the passion which all poets sing, and all men suffer early or late. Poor Bertie!

The long night closed at last, and the cheery dawn entered the room. Bertie sat up and pushed back the heavy hair from her brow.

"How strange my head feels!" she said, "and how giddy I am. Am I really ill, or are these only the results of 'a love affair'?" bitterly, and, sinking back in her pillows, covered her face and moaned like a child in pain.

She took her coffee in bed, then she summoned her maid and bade her dress her; but she felt so languid, so inert, that her toilet was a simple and speedy one.

The long dark hair was caught up, and carelessly wound about the pretty head, and the slim figure was enveloped in a crimson and white dressing-gown, with bright ribbons at the throat, that gave a little colour to the poor pale face.

Thermaid looked anxiously at her; the weary droop of the mouth (that yet looked as if only waited to be kissed into smiles again), the heavy eyes, and the wan cheeks, all enlisted her sympathy.

"But mademoiselle does look ill. Will she have her pillows?" and hastened to wheel a couch towards the fire.

"That will do," Bertie said at last, and the maid disappeared to return in a few moments, with the message that Mrs. Lomax was below, and would be pleased to see her.

"Say I am too ill to admit visitors," petulantly, "I must have rest; I have not slept the whole night," so Mrs. Lomax was compelled to content herself with Bertie's mother.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I have news for you, all our hopes and plans are frustrated. Last night, when you had gone, Hirst told me he had asked Margaret to be his wife. Of course he is master of the Hall, and can please himself, and we have no objection to Miss Ashwin personally; but I was so disappointed I cried. You know how dear that child Bertie is to me, and it makes me positively angry to see Priscilla's dislike of her, and foolish love for Margaret."

"I have seen for some time how matters would be," Mrs. Vandeleur answered, "and you know Hirst is not to blame. Bertie rejected him with positive rudeness—would hear nothing he had to say."

"That was his own fault. If he had been moderately attentive she would have learned to love him, but he always was intolerant to her," vexedly; "and I daresay he blundered dreadfully over his wooing, made it appear he was conferring a favour on her, and you know Bertie's spirit would not submit to that."

"No, we are all very sorry it cannot be, because we had hoped to keep the child with us. Possibly it is for the best, and neither Mr. Vandeleur nor myself would try to force her inclinations. Is the date of the marriage fixed?"

"Oh, yes, by this morning Miss Priscilla had arranged everything. She argues that as Margaret came to the Hall last Christmas-Eve she should go to Hirst on the next twenty-fourth of December, which will allow them time to become better acquainted with each other's foibles. My sister is no advocate for hasty marriages, Hirst of course wishes it to be earlier; but Margaret is quite content to wait until December. I really think she is very amiable, but I should be glad to see her more sprightly, more like Bertie."

As soon as Mrs. Lomax had gone Mrs. Vandeleur went to her daughter's room.

"Are you better, my love?"

"I ought to be; you are all so very kind and

attentive. But my head aches so fearfully, and I am giddy."

"Will my talking annoy you, dear?" applying herself to some lace work; "because I've news for you."

"Talk as much as you please, mother. When I am tired I will ask for silence," speaking wearily.

"Mrs. Lomax has been with me, and she tells me Hirst and Margaret Ashwin are an engaged pair"—she worked on and so did not see the increasing pallor of her daughter's face, the clenching of her little hands. "They are to be married next December, on the anniversary of Margaret's first appearance. My dear, I wish I could have seen you mistress of the Hall. I am cruelly disappointed."

Bertie slipped and fell at her mother's feet, her face hidden in her skirts.

"Oh! don't, mother, don't! You break my heart! I cannot bear any more pain! I knew this last night. Oh, Heaven! I saw their happiness."

Frightened by her sudden passion, Mrs. Vandeleur strove to raise her, but she sank yet lower.

"Let me lie here—leave me alone."

And the mother asked in a whisper,

"Do you love him, Bertie?"

And when the girl only shivered, she bent down and kissed the pretty hair, whilst her tears fell fast—only Bertie did not cry.

She lay silent a time, then suddenly broke into speech, a defiant note running all through her anguish.

"Love him! Why not? Was I not taught to love him? Only I did not know it for very long, because we had been always together. But I cared more for his frown than any other man's angriest words. But when I saw he was indifferent to me, that he only tolerated me, I treated him with disdainful condescension, and said to myself he should never feel himself compelled to marry me. I didn't know I loved him then; I was only angry that all of you tried to thrust me upon him, to make him take me with or without his will. I never was natural with him, and I felt I was changing to all. Not guessing why it was so I grew hard in my thoughts, flippant in my speech, and I was aware Hirst had what the called 'clever flirts,' so before him I flirted outrageously and made sharp speeches, and when others laughed he only preserved a displeased silence. Then, at last, he asked me to marry him, and he didn't try to hide from me that he was honouring me beyond my deserts, that but for our parents' wishes, and because he then loved no woman he would tolerate me!"

"My poor child, my poor darling! I did not dream it was like this with you," the mother said, chokingly.

"Even then," drearily, "I did not guess my own secret; I only felt hurt and angry, a little uneasy too. But I was glad I had said 'no' to him, because I thought when he found I was not lightly to be won, it would make him more eager to win me. I knew the perverseness of men well, and how they always long for what seems unattainable; neglecting and despising that which is close at hand. By that time Margaret had come amongst us, and I was rude and hard with her. She is so beautiful, and I was afraid of her influence over Hirst. I did not love her then, and now I hate her!—I hate her! From the first I distrusted her, and I always shall; and when I saw how determinately Miss Priscilla espoused her cause, and how Hirst seemed to like to be near her, something woke in my heart, and rising to my throat seemed to strangle me. Oh, Heaven! day after day I smiled and talked, and played my hateful part. Day after day I saw them together. I marked the new light in his eyes, the new look on his face, his growing passion for her, his growing contempt for me, and I knew I loved him. But I did not guess how well until last night. I was in the conservatory and I heard their voices; they paused just before me, and he had his arms about her, and was telling her of

his love. He looked as he had never looked at me; his voice had a new, deeper, tenderer tone, and I almost shrieked aloud, but instead I fell back upon the seat; and once, when my agony grew too great for me, I thrust my handkerchief into my mouth that I might not cry out. Oh, mother! Oh, Heaven! I don't remember how long I stayed there, or how at last I reached the house. I don't know when or where my father met me, but when you bent over me in the library I was conscious of all that passed, only I could not cry, I could not move. Mother, mother, mother!" clinging to her skirts, " pity your most unhappy child, and—forget her story?"

Where she had slipped she lay, her face still in her mother's skirts, her long hair unbound falling about her in dark waves, her little hands clenched.

"It has been so hard, she moaned, "so hard that at times I have been almost mad. Oh! he will be sorry for his choice—he will be very sorry. One day she will drive him to desperation. Say I am unjust; say I am blinded by jealousy, your words will not hurt me. I think I am beyond any further hurt."

Then her mother put her arms about her and lifted her on to the couch beside her; drew her head down upon her bosom, and tried to speak comfortingly, but Bertie only said,—

"You are very good, but I want to be alone. I am ashamed to meet your eyes. Please, please leave me?" So Mrs. Vandeleur stole out, and she lay all that morning with hidden face, having tasted at last the wine of love to the very dregs; having entered suddenly upon her woman's heritage; knowing that unless, indeed, his heart turned to her, sorrow would be her guest through all the days to come.

The cruellest thought to her was that she loved one who never cared to make her heart his, who never sought to win her with tender glances and words that women long to hear. It shamed her to know that though she was all his he would never claim her, never desire her.

"Oh" she said in her anguish, "I have blindly asserted woman's right and given him all my treasure; now if he learns it let him use man's, and laugh me to scorn, Oh! Heaven am I to have nothing in exchange for my broken and marred life? Am I always to be the abject slave of an unrequited love?"

"Then half unconsciously she murmured words that came to her again and again, in those dreadful hours of agony:—

"I will possess him or will die,
I will grow round him in his place,
Grow, live, die, looking on his face,
Die, dying, clasped in his embrace."

Then she laughed, "What a fool I am to think I could win what never was mine, could woo him from her? Would I have his love at such a price, his treachery and mine. Oh, Heaven! which way shall I turn for comfort?"

She did not leave her room that day, and at night she was so weary she fell into a restless sleep, haunted by dreams of her waking sorrow. In the morning she rose and allowed herself to be dressed, and went down just as Mrs. Lomax was announced.

That lady exclaimed anxiously, when she saw Bertie's pale face and hollow-looking eyes, "My dear, I am afraid you have suffered dreadfully. You look as though you had been ill for weeks instead of a day and a night; I had no idea your indisposition was so serious."

"You are like the patient man's comforters, Mrs. Lomax," smiling faintly, "and really I am much better to-day; and probably to-morrow I shall be restored to my usual state of robustness and impertinence—I hope so sincerely."

"So we all do, dear! Margaret wanted to come, but I thought two visitors might prove too many for you, and I was too selfish to lose the pleasure of seeing you. I hoped I should be the most acceptable to you, Bertie?"

"And so you are, dear Mrs. Lomax. My acquaintance with Miss Ashwin does not seem

to ripen into friendship—understand, the fault is mine. It may be I am a little jealous of her beauty," with the same faint smile; "but you will carry my congratulations to her and tell her I sincerely wish her happiness; soon I will do it in person and not by proxy." She leaned back in her chair a trifle paler, but as she sat far in the shadow her visitor did not see that, and only Mrs. Vandeleur guessed her pain.

Mrs. Lomax said, "I will not forget your message, dear, but, oh! how I wish Hirst had chosen you!"

Poor Bertie winced as if a rough hand had touched some half-healed wound, but she answered carelessly,—

"It was well we young ones did not gratify your wish, as the same house would certainly not have accommodated Miss Priscilla and myself. Oh!" laughing feebly, "how she does hate me! I believe she fancies 'all the wickedness in the world is print to me.'"

By the close of the week, if a trifle paler, Bertie was so much her old self that her mother sometimes doubted if that impassioned declaration had really taken place in the pretty pink and blue boudoir, or if it had been only a very vivid dream.

When an invitation to dine at the Hall *en famille* came she was alarmed for Bertie, but the girl said, decidedly,—

"Oh! we will go, by all means. I want to see how Hirst looks the character of 'engaged man.' I should say he will be amusing, and I want to give Margaret my good wishes, mother."

Miss Ashwin led the girl to her own room.

"You are still pale, my dear," gently, and helping her with her wraps. "I was quite alarmed about you that night you fainted, and we have all been very anxious about you."

"Do you include Miss Priscilla in that 'all'?" laughing incredulously. "Pray don't try to impose that upon me, Margaret."

"Indeed she was, and would have come to you, but Mrs. Lomax prevented her. Don't you know how good her heart is?"

"I know it is too narrow for more than one attachment at a time," lightly. "But now let me wish you all the happiness you can desire. When you first came I said a fitting conclusion to your story would be your marriage with the 'Fairy Prince'; I think I shall go further, and say I prophesied. One consideration only stays me."

"And that?" Margaret asked, smiling, and passing her arm round the slender waist. "What is it? May I hear it?"

"Oh! certainly. I remember an old saying which runs like this, 'A prophet is not without honour save in his own country and amongst his own people,'" and, laughing, they ran downstairs.

When Hirst and Mr. Vandeleur joined the ladies after dinner Mrs. Lomax said,—

"Sing that pretty song you gave us last night, Hirst," and explained to her guests the pretty song was composed by a friend of her son's, the words being from one of Tennyson's short poems.

The young man played a low, sweet symphony in a minor key, then began to sing in a very tolerable tenor:—

"O sweet, pale Margaret, O rare, pale Margaret,
You love remaining peacefully,
To hear the murmur of the strife
But enter not the toil of life.
Your spirit is the calmed sea,
Laid by the tumult of the fight.
You are the evening star, alway
Remaining betwixt dark and light;
Lulled echoes of labourious day
Come to you, gleams of mellow light
Float by you on the verge of night."

Bertie glanced at Margaret as the verse closed, and saw she was deadly pale, whilst her eyes gleamed with some hidden pain; but Hirst did not see, and Margaret hid her face behind her screen as he sang again with greater emphasis,—

"O sweet, pale Margaret, O rare, pale Margaret,
Come down, come down, and hear me speak;
Tie up the ringlets on your cheek;

The sun is just about to set,
The arching limes are tall and shady,

And faint, rainy lights are seen
Moving in the leafy beech.

Rise from the feast of sorrow, lady,

Where all day long you sit between
Joy and woe, and whisper each,
Or only look across the lawn,

Look out below your bower-eaves,
Look down and let your blue eyes dawn
Upon me through the jasmine leaves."

Margaret had risen at the words "The sun is just about to set," and had slowly drawn near to Hirst. Her face was turned from the others as she laid her shaking hands upon his shoulders, and when he looked up he was surprised at her ghastliness.

"Don't sing that again if you would spare me pain," she said, quickly; "it reminds me of my most unhappy days, only the air is different;" and partly to cover her emotion, partly to win her to forgetfulness of her wretched past, he broke into *Polly*, which was a great favourite with Mr. Vandeleur.

"Now I wonder," thought Bertie, who had seen all the by-play, "what there was in that song to move her out of her usual sweet calm. I've seen her quite untouched by the loveliest, saddest music or poems; even 'The Prince's Progress' did not stir her, although I found it hard not to make a fool of myself over the heroine's sorrows."

Then she was called upon to take the place Hirst had just vacated, of which she was rather glad, not caring to see the impassioned glances he cast upon his "rare, pale Margaret!"

As the days passed the friendship between the two girls grew rather less than more, although Miss Ashwin did her best to win Bertie's affection.

Naturally the latter did not feel drawn to one who had robbed her so entirely of the man she loved, and Miss Priscilla was not slow to comment on Bertie's conduct in no measured terms, so that a coldness sprang up between Hirst and the girl.

It was very hard to bear, yet it seemed easier than his kindness would have been. It helped her to maintain her old pride, to jest and laugh as much as in former days, only her admirers murmured amongst themselves that "Miss Vandeleur was sometimes too sharp on a fellow, and had the lightest, cheeriest way of saying nasty things." Men began to feel uneasy with her, were never sure that she was not secretly ridiculing them; and wise matrons remarked among themselves that, in spite of her prettiness and her fortune, Bertie would die an old maid. Amongst all the men who fluttered and hovered about her, Captain Grey was the most assiduous. His furlough had long ended, but his regiment had been quartered at the nearest garrison town, which was but five miles from the Robinettes, and rarely a day passed when he might not be seen riding up to the house, looking handsome and dashing enough, on his beautiful bay mare.

Mr. Vandeleur grew anxious, but his wife only smiled, and said he was "singeing his wings," that Bertie would never think seriously of him.

So May came, soft and bright, and all the world was dressed in tender green; the chestnuts were beginning to blossom in white and delicate pink, with here and there some dull red flowers; the hedgerows were showing tiny pale buds peeping out of their green sheaths, and the banks were bright with primroses, wild hyacinths, anemones, and late violets.

Captain Grey thought he had never seen the world so fair, and he swung down the narrow path by the stream in search of Bertie. He had recognised the growing coldness in Mr. Vandeleur's manner, so had stabled his horse in the village, and, resolving that day to put his fate to the test, set out to look for the lady of his choice. He was desperate, the increasing attention of his creditors made his position an unenviable one, and he sighed for

the ease Bertie's fortune would command. "He did not love the girl, but he should be good and attentive to her," and as he thought thus he caught the flutter of her lilac dress. She was leaning upon some railings, looking down into the water, and the slim form, framed in masses of green, with myriads of blossoms at the tiny feet, seemed a very part of the Spring—so fresh and dainty was it. The large white hat was discarded and lay upon the grass; the soft breeze stirred the short curly about her face and ruffled the dark hair into a very pretty state of dishevelment.

His heart beat a little faster as he drew near. He would have been less than man not to have been stirred by her innocent prettiness, and something like pity for her should she say "Yes" to his wooing troubled his peace. For a moment the careless soldier shuddered to think of that white life linked to his; remembered, too, a gentle girl he had left in a far-away town to mourn his loss.

But "needs must when the devil drives," and he lulled his conscience to rest and went on.

At the sound of his steps the girl turned her face towards him and sniffed slowly and faintly, but did not attempt to move, and he took courage from what he fancied was timidity.

"I thought I should find you somewhere in the grounds. Pray don't alter your pose; it is perfection, and you look like Spring yourself." He laid one hand upon the two little ones crossed lightly on the rails, and Bertie knew what was coming. "I rode over to see you," he said. "Miss Vandeleur, I cannot go on in this way longer."

"What way?" with a lazy upward look. "Are you thinking of reforming?" with languid interest.

He coloured through his bronzed skin, but answered, readily,—

"Yes, there is great need I should. Miss Vandeleur—Bertie, will you help me in my endeavours? I want to make myself worthy you. I am a blunt fellow. I cannot say well what I wish, but I love you, and I want you to make me happy by giving me your hand."

She smiled in a strange way.

"Would my hand alone make you happy? If it came empty to you, what then?"

He was too far in the venture to retreat, so he said, apparently with pain,—

"Oh, will you not believe you are beloved for yourself, and yourself only? If you were poor and I rich it would be my happiness to play the king to your beggar-maid. Listen to me, my darling?" trying to steal an arm about her. "Why should your cursed fortune come between us? I have dared to hope you were not indifferent to me!"

"There you were right," coolly; "for I hate and despise you; and even if by your flatteries you had won my heart I would not marry you, because the memory of one woman would rise like a ghost between us, and destroy my chances of happiness," her voice quickened there. "Have you never cared to know what happened to Dolores Winthorpe after you bade her good-bye?"

He broke in hoarsely,—

"Who told you of—of her?"

"Myrs Danwiddie; and I have known that story from the first—how, in the selfish indulgence of a selfish passion, you sought her out and won her love, and then, because your needs must be supplied by a wife's dowry, you left her; left her to sorrow, the reproaches of friends, the contumely of enemies, to sickness," and as she paused he questioned, with an awful fear at his heart,—

"What has happened to Dolores?"

"Death!" she answered, tersely, and saw his face grow ashen, and his jaw drop, heard his muttered words, "Good Heaven! I murdered her!" and for very pity bent her head upon her hands. When she looked up he was gone; and so ended the Captain's wooing.

(To be concluded in our next.)

FACETIE.

"Don't you think Miss K—— a nice girl?" asked a youth of a friend. "An ice girl! You bet! She gave me the cold shake anyway."

DESCRIBING IT EFFECTIVELY.—A facetious man, speaking of a relative who was hanged, said that he died during a tight-rope performance.

What is the difference between drowning men and thirsty men? Drowning men catch at straws to no purpose, but thirsty men catch at straws for a certain purpose.

"In all the world were blind," said a sympathetic lady who had just been inspecting a school for the blind, "what a melancholy sight it would be!"

"Or what use would archives have been to Noah?" asked a lecturer, who was "bearing" everything ancient. He was taken aback when an auditor exclaimed: "He could have kept his bees in Ark-hives!"

A new miser has a niece, whom he proclaims to be his heiress, but who has never seen any of his money. "Your niece is twenty years old," said a friend; "you ought to do something towards getting her settled." "Oh, well," replied the miser, after reflection, "I will pretend to be ill!"

GUZZES.

I am delighted to find in this world so many things I can't prove; this satisfies me that there is a power greater than I am, or envy one else is.

It is utterly impossible for an infidel to be a truly brave man or a fast friend.

It may be possible for a man to be perfectly happy, but not possible to remain so long.

The poor have to pay for all they get, the rich often ride for nothing. Who ever heard of a pauper with a valuable pass in his pocket?

Talk is cheap; if it wasn't, two-thirds of the world would be bankrupts to-day.

The grate art in knowing how to make money is to know how to spend it.

Science and true religion can not be separated; they go hand in hand, and common-sense points out the way.

I don't care how much bread a man has got, provided he lives up to it, and keeps it to himself, and lets other people alone.

The heart may possibly subsist on music, but the brain must have sterner stuff.

Life is short, but it is too long for most people.

Apologize are risky things envy how; half the time they ain't called for, and half the time they ain't true.

There are plenty of people who can tell you exactly what kind of a day it will be to-morrow, who couldn't tell, to save their lives, what kind of a man they are going to be themselves.

Put me down as one of the radicals; if I am right I kant be too radikal; if wrong, I kant be too konservative.

The demands of nature bring all to one common level; the prince and the pauper shiver and starve alike.

True religion is aggressive, but it is aggressive against sin, not against other people's religion.

Nothing is more easy than to git rich; it requires but fu branes and no harte at all.

There is no such thing as "original sin"; all sin is a counterfitt ov sum virtev.

He who lives upon hope will die in despair; hope fattens on itself.

There are many things in the Bible I kant understand, but there are so many beautiful and impressive ones that I can understand, that I respect those that I kant.

There are many people so gracious and thin-skinned they apologize for everything they do, whether it is right or wrong.

If it was not for the luv ov money two-thirds of mankind would hav nothing else to live.

JOSH BILLINGS.

WHAT A HIGHLY-CULTURED MODERN YOUNG LADY KNEW.—She knew music and painting and style, and possibly knew how to flirt; but—saints of the kitchen!—she asked for a gridiron to iron a shirt.

A LECTURER, discoursing on the subject of health, inquired: "What use can a man make of his time while waiting for a doctor?" "He can make his will!" some one in the audience called out.

SIR TO MUSIC.—A gentleman who was blessed with a musical son-in-law, on seeing a joke to the effect that "the musician, like the cook, makes his bread out of dough," remarked: "That may be so in some instances; but in my case the musician makes his bread out of me."

THE JAPANESE PREMIER, Prince Kung, addressed General Grant, when he was in Japan, in English, so-called. Endeavouring to compliment him by assuring him that he was born to command, he said, "Sire, brave generale, you vos made to order."

Is there any resemblance between poor men and poor umbrellas, and if there is, what is it?" They resemble one another in the fact that they are apt always to be "left," when there is any chance for a choice either as to men or umbrellas.

"If you were suddenly reduced to abject poverty, what business would you make a fresh start in?" asked a young man of Moses Shauzberg. "In dot gase," responded Moses, slowly, "I would go into a pinshop in a small way in which I could make fifty per cent profit." "What kind of a business?" "I would split matches and sell 'em."

SAWING WOOD ON THE OLD.—Every fox praises his own tail. A debt is adorned by payment. When fish are rare, even a crab is a fish. Every little frog is great in his own bog. Go after two wolves, and you will not even catch one. Ask a pig to dinner, and he will put his feet on the table. Disease comes by hundredweights, and goes out by ounces.

HIS PROPER PLEASE.—"Parson, I would much rather hear you preach," said a baffled, swindling horse-jockey, "than to see you interfere in bargains between man and man." "Well," replied the parson, "if you had been where you ought to have been last Sunday you would have heard me preach." "Where was that?" inquired the jockey. "In the county gaol," replied the clergyman.

HE WOULD DO.—Barry Sullivan, the Irish tragedian, was playing in *Richard III.* some years ago at Shrewsbury. When the actor came to the lines: "A horse! a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" someone in the pit called out—"Wouldn't a donkey do you, Mr. Sullivan?" "Yes," responded the tragedian, turning quickly on the interrupter, "please come round to the stage door."

BOTH ENDS LEFT.—A station inspector on one of our railways some days ago received a letter from a gentleman, inquiring for a box which had been misplaced or lost, adding by way of description: "The box has 'A. B.' marked upon the left side." Whereupon he received from the inspector the following answer: "After a careful inspection of all luggage at this station, and very mature deliberation thereupon, we are of the opinion that both ends of your trunk are left."

SCARING THEM OFF.—"Goodness me!" exclaimed Mr. Winks, "there is a young couple looking at that vacant house next door, and they've got a baby—looks awful cross too." "Horrors!" screamed Mrs. Winks, "what shall we do? Can't we scare them off somehow? Go tell them the roof leaks, and the walls are damp, and—tell them the last tenant died of small-pox." "I'd like to, dear, but it wouldn't do. The landlord would sue for damages." "Oh, mercy! something must be done, Mr. Winks, before they decide to take it. Oh, do think of something." "I have it. Run down to the piano and sing 'Sweet Violets'."

SOCIETY.

The Queen and Princess Beatrice, on their arrival at Aix, took up their abode at the Villa Mette, and have been paying a round of visits. It is possible that Her Majesty may meet the Emperor of Germany while abroad; but they will probably leave for Darmstadt about the 21st inst. A few days only are to be spent at the latter place, when the Royal party will return to Windsor.

The Duke of Connaught will not, it is said, return to England for another twelve months, having been appointed to command a division on the North-West frontier of India. It is said the Duke obtained permission from the Queen with great difficulty to prolong his stay in India, in order that he might take command of a division in the North-West, that is in order that he may have a share in the new Afghan expedition, which appears pretty certain to be proceeded with whether or not the threatened war with Russia is abandoned.

The wedding-dress of Miss Conant, of Lynden Hall, Rutland, was unique and picturesque. It was composed of white Indian muslin, over white satin, made short; the bodice was full, and drawn into the waist by a satin band. On one side of the skirt was a handsome fall of Maurene lace, the other being caught with wreaths of natural Hilles-of-the-valley; a wreath of the same flowers, and a tulip veil, secured to the hair by a diamond spray. The bridesmaids' dresses were also of Indian muslin, over primrose-coloured satin, the full bodices being confined to the waist with sashes of primrose satin merveilleux, and hats *à la suite*. Each wore a gold and pearl monogram brooch, and carried primrose posies, the gifts of the bridegroom, Mr. Edmond Nugent.

The Princess of Wales has consented to become president of the Ladies' Committee of Major Gildes's Fund for the relief of the wives and families of men of all branches of land and sea forces of the United Kingdom. The Marchioness of Salisbury, the Countesses Stanhope, Crawford and Balcarres, and Lathom have recently joined the committee.

The ladies of Devonshire have presented Mrs. Temple with a silver tea and coffee service and three diamond stars as a parting present on her leaving the county with the Bishop for London.

QUEEN MARGHERITA OF ITALY, in accordance with her annual custom, made the so-called visit to the sepulchre at no fewer than six churches in Rome on Holy Thursday. Both King and Queen were present the same evening at the performance of Gounod's "Redemption," under the direction of Signor Sambatti.

THE EMPEROR OF GERMANY, who is now quite well again, leaves Berlin shortly for Wiesbaden; he will afterwards proceed to Ems and Gastein. Prince Bismarck, accompanied by the Princess, has gone to Schonhausen.

SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE is in excellent health, although too weak to leave his room. He takes a lively interest in all passing events, and during the Festival of the Passover he has each evening joined in a service, repeating the responses with much intelligence and fervour. He has an excellent appetite, and eats and sleeps well; occasionally he reverses the order of things, and sleeps during the day, taking his meals at night.

THE Prince of Wales held a levee in the Throne Room of Dublin Castle recently. There was a tremendous crush to get into St. Patrick's Hall, where the company assembled, and all that presented itself for description, as far as those in the gallery set apart for the Press were concerned, was a magnificently decorated hall with numerous artistic embellishments, and with many floral devices and evergreens distributed about its walls and galleries. The floor of the hall was entirely occupied by a surging mass of gentlemen of all ranks, in the most extraordinary variety of costume.

STATISTICS.

THE SLAVE TRADE OF AFRICA.—The number of slaves who have been deported from the coast of Mozambique since the establishment of the slave trade in 1645 cannot possibly be ascertained, but that it would far surpass ordinary belief is evident from the following figures given by Molinari:—Exportation of slaves from 1807 to the establishment of slavery in 1819:—For Brazil, 680,000; for the Spanish Colonies, 615,000; for other points, 562,000; lost on the voyage, 337,000. Ditto from 1819 to 1847:—For Brazil, 1,122,000; for the Spanish Colonies, 831,000; lost on the voyage, 688,000; captured, 117,000; total, 4,452,000. Nearly 5,000,000 of slaves imported from one part alone of the Portuguese possessions in Africa in the space of forty years! To these figures a large addition may be made for deaths in the struggles attending capture and on the way to the sea coast. As domestic slavery existed then as now, and as slave-catching was accompanied by the destruction of villages and crops and the slaughter of all who resisted, the wonder is that the region which suffered such depredations did not become almost wholly depopulated. And in spite of all the efforts of England and France, the slave trade exists even in the present day.

GEMS.

EDUCATE all the faculties and propensities of children; above all, see that the conscience, the balance-wheel of the moral system, is trained unto perfect accord with the principles of positive truth and absolute justice.

IGNORANCE is a sorry jade which causes everyone who mounts it to stumble, and each who leads it to be laughed at. Ignorance of the laws of health is the sorriest of all jades, and causes much stumbling into the dark pits of ill-health, physical suffering, and premature death which abound all around us.

Woe will ever follow those who allow power or fashion, or the opinions of others, or anything else human, to interfere with personal responsibility, or to render them unfaithful to their own convictions.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CAKES.—Three heaping tablespoonfuls of sugar, two heaping tablespoonfuls of butter, one egg, two tablespoonfuls of corn-flour, put into three cups of flour, a small cup of sweet milk, a heaping teaspoonful of cream of tartar and a half teaspoonful of soda, a pinch of salt, a few dried currants; roll out in powdered sugar; cut in strips, and twist them into fancy shapes; sprinkle over them coloured caraway; bake quick—a light brown.

RICE CHICKEN PIE.—Cover the bottom of a pudding-dish with slices of cooked ham; cut up a boiled chicken, and nearly fill the dish; add chopped onions, if you like, or a little curry powder, which is better. Then add boiled rice to fill all interstices, and to cover the top thick. Bake it for one-half or three-quarters of an hour.

SIRUP FOR COLDS AND COUGHS.—Take eighteen ounces of perfectly sound onions, and, after removing the rind, make several incisions, but not too deep. Boil together with thirteen and a-half ounces of moist sugar and two and three-quarter ounces of honey in thirty-five ounces of water for three-quarters of an hour; strain, and fill into bottles for use. Give one tablespoonful of this mixture—slightly warmed—immediately on attack, and then, according to requirement, five to eight half-tablespoonfuls daily. This receipt was that used by the Zulu Caffres who visited Europe two years since, and who suffered much from the climate, but invariably recovered after taking the syrup.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The latest industry is the manufacture of artificial ivory from bones and scraps of sheepskin.

The scientist with nothing else to do has figured out that a grasshopper has proportionately 120 times the kicking power of a man.

THE deepest gold mine in the world is the Eureka, in California, which is down 1,200 feet, or 500 feet below the level of the sea. The deepest silver mine is the Mexican, on the Comstock, which is down 3,500 feet.

An earthquake shock travels about twenty-five miles a minute through hard substances; but soft substances, such as sand and gravel, or clay, retard its rate of progress, and, of course, in water it gets on much slower still.

THEIR has been invented an electric self-acting compass, which by opening and closing the circuit, keeps the ship on her appointed course without the intervention of a man at the wheel, so that the old sign, prohibiting conversation with that official, may now be painted out.

ATER considerable difficulty a photographer succeeded in taking an instantaneous negative of a railway train in motion, only to discover that he might just as well have taken his time to it and photographed a train standing still, as the appearance of the negative was precisely the same.

CONTRARY to the general belief, statistics show that the mortality in clear, cold weather is greater than in a mild, moist winter. Many people, on account of insufficient protection against the cold, contract disease, and others with delicate respiratory organs are worn out and weakened by the continued hammering of intense cold, as it were, on the lungs and bronchial tubes.

A NEW horseshoe is now being made, which is in two parts, the upper designed to remain permanently upon the foot, where it will last for an indefinite time, as no wear comes upon it; the other, which contains the corks, is joined to the upper in an ingenious manner. The lower halves of the shoes are interchangeable—sharp corks for icy weather and dull ones for heavy draught horses, or they may be removed entirely at night to prevent injury to the animal while in the stall.

ON moonlight nights Cubans have a curious custom of betaking themselves to sheltered balconies and carrying umbrellas. They are all more afraid of the rays of the moon than of sunstroke, and will never permit themselves to be exposed to its rays.

THE USE OF IRIDIUM.—The chief application of iridescence in the arts has been the pointing of gold pens. Iridescence being the so-called "diamond point" of the pen manufacturers, which consists simply of a small grain of iridescence which has been selected for the purpose and soldered to the tip of the pen. These points are selected by first removing from the ore, by means of a magnet, the magnetic oxide of iron which always accompanies it, and then dissolving out, by means of acids, the other impurities which may be present; the ore is then washed with water, dried, and sifted in order to remove the fine dust, and the sifted ore is then ready for the selection of points. This is done by an operator, who rolls the grains of iridescence around with a needle point, examining them under a magnifying glass and selecting those which are solid, compact, and of the proper size, colour, and shape. These points are usually selected in three grades, small, medium, and large, depending upon the size of the pen for which they are intended to be used. The grain of iridescence having been soldered on the end of the pen, it is sawed in two (which makes the two nibs of the pen), and ground up to the proper shape.

May 2, 1885.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. F.—1. Decidedly too young. 2. Fair. 3. No.
"THIRTY YEARS."—We cannot recommend a school.

C. B. D.—The stamp would cost ten shillings.

G. L. D.—Composition and writing are both first-class; spelling is passable.

C. K. H.—1. The 28th June, 1871, came on a Wednesday. 2. Good writing.

R. M.—You can summon her for illegal pawning if she persists in refusing.

HARCOURT.—1. Nothing but the tweasers. 2. Temperance and plenty of outdoor exercise.

MAYFLOWER.—The divorce would not stand in this country.

ELLA.—There is no immediate hurry. Wait and watch the course of events.

S. J. W.—We regret we cannot inform you. Write to the editor of one of the papers in the town named.

FAIR FRANCES.—1. The 2nd June, 1885, fall on a Monday. The 30th March, 1872, on a Saturday. 2. Certainly, if they mutually respect one another.

THE ANCIENT MARINERS.—1. The usual fashionable type. 2. Wear a plain down the back. 3. The receipt was given last week.

E. D. N.—The first step to take is to tell your mother all about the matter, and then to be guided by her advice. She will do more to help you than all others.

A. A. R.—The hair is light auburn. Emma means "a nurse" Frank according to some authorities "free," according to others "bold," "farcical."

A. Pupil.—It would take at least two years practising four hours a day to become moderately proficient on the piano.

R. N. N.—He is a little clumsy, but he does not mean to tease you. If you are discreet he will be likely to propose very soon.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—If the coachman was retained in the carriage the master is bound to pay the wages, but not the doctor's bill unless he agreed to do so.

L. N.—Pay no attention whatever to such idle talk. You are probably an interesting and attractive girl, and naturally receive attention.

ANXIOUS ONE.—1. Apply at a music-seller's who deals in the instrument. 2. Quite good enough. 3. Write and make it up.

A. G. F.—Keep it cut short, and wash with a mixture of camphorated and sweet oil. Any chemist will give the proportions.

H. M. A.—The Portuguese language is generally spoken in Brazil, and is the court language. The Spaniards are the dominant race in the Argentine Republic.

FLORIDA.—Try the following silverying paste for platinum:—Nitrate of silver, one part; cyanide of potassium, three parts, and sufficient water to form a paste. Apply to the articles with a rag.

F. J. T.—1. Keep the hands covered and put oatmeal in the water in which they are washed. You cannot scratch your fingers. 2. Kindly say what kind of punch.

ELIJAH.—1. You had better send the dress to a cleaner's. Dark trimming would look best. 2. Warm baths might be useful, but Turkish baths should not be taken except under medical advice.

AVON.—Never was jet more fashionable than at present, and a very large number of jet trimmings are prepared with it, including jetted net and velvet, jet drops, and jet embroidered front and panels.

N. M. A.—Wool crepe is a new material for summer dresses. It is exceedingly pretty in cream, pink, blue, and other delicate tones, and has the merit of falling in soft, graceful folds.

J. C. T.—If the sleeves of your dress be long and plain, the gloves should be drawn over them. If the sleeves be short, then the gloves should be just long enough to meet them.

E. C. J.—Fanciful little jackets of various descriptions are coming in vogue. They are usually of rich material, shovily trimmed, and are particularly becoming to slight figures.

A. D.—The young man is rather frivolous and not worth your attention. You had better treat him hereafter as a friendly acquaintance merely, and not regard him as a beau or a suitor. He is probably too young to be treated seriously.

B. F. S.—Small shot are not cast in moulds like bullets, but are made by dropping melted lead from the top of high towers called "shot-towers." The lead of which they are made has a little arsenic mixed with it, which makes it softer and causes it to take the round form more easily. When mixed, it is poured into moulds and made into bars, and these are hoisted up to the top of the shot-tower. Some shot-towers are as high as a church steeple; they have to be made much higher for making large shot than for making small shot. At the top of the tower is a furnace in which the lead is again melted, and it is then poured on to iron plates full of little round holes, so placed that the lead after going through the holes will fall down to the bottom of the tower. The shot are made round and

hand by falling through the air, and are cooled by dropping into a cistern of water at the bottom. They are then dried, separated into different sizes by sifting them through sieves, and polished by turning them round in a kind of barrel with some powdered black-lead. Sometimes the lead is poured down deep pits in the earth instead of from towers. At Newcastle a deserted colliery is thus used.

MARIE ANTOINETTE.—1. Write to the editor of the *Bro.* 2. Not at all. 3. Fair. 4. Yes. 5. With the opening of Parliament. 6. Thanks for the receipt. 7. We cannot oblige you.

NAUGHTY EMMIE.—1. Yes. 2. Give him in charge. 3. If he is ready to keep you must live with him, unless you have very strong grounds to take the opposite course.

A. A. B.—1. He could care very much for you. 2. Dark brown. It would match with either blue or brown eyes. 3. The question has been repeatedly answered in previous numbers. 4. Brown.

DWYNG.—1. Certainly, if they are the result of her own earnings, and she states so at the time of the deposit. 2. She must make a will—if she wishes to leave it to any particular person, otherwise it would become the property of her husband and children, if any.

R. O.—1. We should prefer the post-office. 2. Yes. 3. You would have to pass the examinations. 4. By its lightness chiefly, and the closeness of its grain, also the uniformity of its colour. 5. Live temporarily, and take plenty of exercise.

ONE "SWEET GIRL GRADUATE."

We talked upon the terrace stair,
The light of morning on her face,
The sunshine tangled in her hair;

She stood a young, incarnate Grace;

With her impassioned, hazel eyes,

And that soft light about her head,

How fair she seemed, how wondrous wise,

Tho' I forgot just what she said.

I only know my love discussed

Spores, evolution, germs, and things,

A—d how a monad the dust

Warmed in its heart the blood of kings;

But when it came to zoophytes,

And those strange, monstrous forms that were,

She sealed such speculative heights—

My floundering wits lost track of her.

And when, half dazed and desperate

(My train was due at nine-fifteen),

I gasped, resolved to know my fate,

Despite the period Miocene—

"Dear, if, indeed, you love me, set,

Once and for all, the happy day!"

She mentioned some dim cycle yet

A hundred million years away.

So love's brief fairy tale was told?

Well, not exactly, friend. You see,

I knew her worth—the sterling gold

Beneath her girlish pedantry;

She rules her hub and home and life

Sweet, gracious, wise—my Eloise;

Fond mother, sir, and model wife,

In spite of all the "Ologies."

E. A. B.—A PERPLEXED ONE.—1. Not unless contracted according to the laws of the German State. 2. Edward, "happy keeper," Ferdinand, "a ruler"; Louise, "feminine of Louis," "defender of the people." 3. Hair flaxen, of delicate texture. 4. Send it to the maker. 5. Fair writing.

E. A. N.—The young man probably has not sufficient means to marry, and no prospect of having the means. He does not want to lose you, and yet cannot marry. In such a case the lady must act in self-defence. It would be better to kindly dismiss him than to wait and give up all hopes of a happy union with a more eligible suitor.

G. O.—Go to your relatives or nearest friends. Do not be persuaded to come to this city with a view of becoming an actress. You could not get employment, and would be very sure to get into difficulties greater than any you have known. If the young man desired to marry you he would do so publicly, in the presence of all your friends. He would not try to entice you from your home. Be weary and discreet. Try to get employment in a respectable family.

R. M. A.—The tea plant is an evergreen shrub which when wild grows from twenty-five to thirty feet, but when cultivated is kept pruned so that it is generally less than six feet. It is raised from the seed. The plants yield when about three years old, but give the most leaves when about ten years old. The first picking takes place in April; the second (the best usually) in May; the third in June; and the fourth (the poorest) in August. Each picker has a small bamboo basket strung by a cord round his neck, leaving both hands free. These baskets when filled are emptied into larger ones which are carried to the curing places. The green and black teas are made from the same leaves, but are cured differently. When the leaves are dried quickly they make green tea; when allowed to dry slowly, so that they ferment or work a little, they turn black and make black tea. The leaves are first dried in shallow baskets in the sun, and are then put, a few at a time, in an iron or copper pan, and then stirred until they are dry enough, when they are

emptied upon a table, where other workmen have them with their hands into little rolls in which we make them. They are dried a second time, sorted, and made ready for packing. The thin, silky, yellow paper in which tea is packed is mulberry paper, made from the bark of the young shoots of the tree which grows in China, Japan, and the Pacific Islands. The Chinese make considerable use for tea-chests by pouring melted lead on a flat slab, and then putting another flat on top of it; but they get most of their sheet lead now from England.

S. F. G.—"Enid" is pronounced as a word of two syllables—E-nid—with the "e" long, and accented. Soak the mulin, and wash it well in cold water, and then use salts of lemon (binoxalate of potash). Remember these salts are very poisonous.

JESSICA.—To give the scientific names, active properties, medicinal properties, and appropriate doses for adults of each of the ten fluid extracts named, would require more space than could be possibly spared. A chemist could furnish you with the information.

JANNETTE.—Runaway matches should not receive the sanction of anyone, as they generally end unhappily. If the girl to whom you refer is not of age, her parents have a right to object to her marriage at present, and the acquaintances of her lover who advise a clandestine marriage are doing what is decidedly wrong.

AVIA.—The diamond mines of Brazil are perhaps the most important in the world. The richest gold mines of this empire are found in the province of Minas-Geraes, near Ouru Preto. Among the trees found in Brazil may be mentioned the rosewood tree, the mahogany, the cocanut palm, and the eucalyptus.

L. J. O.—The climate of Uruguay, of which Montevideo is the capital, is mild and healthful. The language of the country is Spanish. The form of Government is in theory republican, but in practice it has been a military despotism. There is a telegraph connection with Europe and North America by way of Rio de Janeiro, and also by way of Buenos Ayres and Chili.

LADY EUNICE.—Your parents' objection to your betrothal; because he is a small man, is unreasonable. Some of the brightest and greatest men have been small in stature. Lord John Russell and Napoleon Bonaparte were small men. St. Paul was a small man. The list might be indefinitely extended, but we have given instances enough to enable you to appeal strongly to your parents in favour of your little beau. But should they prove obdurate, you can wait till you are twenty-one, and then you will have a right to decide for yourself.

FREDA CLINTON.—1. The lines are from a poem by James Shirley the dramatist, a contemporary of Shakespeare, entitled, "All equal in the grave." We append the stanza containing them:

"The garlands wither on thy brow,
Then boast no more your mighty deeds,
Upon death's purple altar now,
See where the victor-victim bleeds;
Your heads must come,

To the cold tomb;

Only the actions of the just

Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.

2. With respect to your other question see the notice about subscription at the foot of this column.

M. D. D.—1. If you wish to get rid of dyspepsia, give your stomach and brain less to do. To follow any particular regimen will be useless—such as living on dry bread or any such stuff—at length the brain is in a constant state of excitement. Take a good quantity of exercise and a goodly amount of sleep; let your recreation be of an innocent, light kind; eat moderately, slowly, and of whatever diet that does not positively disagree with you. Above all, banish all thoughts on the subject of your trouble, for if you are constantly thinking and talking of dyspepsia, the chances are that you will surely have it in its most aggravated form. As an eminent authority has remarked on the subject: "Keep a clear conscience, live temperately, regularly, cleanly; be industrious, too, but avoid excess in that, as in all other things." 2. The prominence of your shoulder-blades appears to be a physical defect, for which no remedy can be recommended.

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